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# DUNGEON®

A DUNGEONS & DRAGONS® ROLEPLAYING GAME SUPPLEMENT

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# Love of the Kill

This month's editorial is brought to you by the month of April. That is, I was in the process of writing it for April, when Steve said that I should pair it with a *Dragon* editorial, for ultimate top 10 listy goodness. Because, you see, this editorial was ... is going to feature the top monsters I love to run as a DM. Steve's idea was to also write the list of monsters I love to fight for *Dragon*, which you can find here, and pair the two editorials. Stupid good ideas... So anyway, here it is. This might get you thinking about your own list, and maybe you can think about how to drop one or more of those monsters into your next game.

We've all seen lists of favorite monsters. Every player has them, whether you're a DM or not. Our favorites are not necessarily the monsters we DMs have the most fun actually running. My list has changed from my 3E days. Back then, any monster over, say, CR 8 was unlikely to make my list. They were so complex that analysis paralysis too often sucked the fun out of the experience.

These days, my list is long, and covers a wide range of levels. For that reason, as with the *Dragon* editorial, I'll put five of my selections here and the full list up on the D&D Community group. Without further delay:

**The Dominator:** This is a class of monster best exemplified by the vampire. They're fantastic. Don't let any Twilighter tell you otherwise: It's not because vampires sparkle. Because they don't. Ever. It's because they can make a character a thrall. Any monster that can take a character's actions away is great. A monster that not only takes your action but then turns it back around to hurt the rest of the party? Priceless entertainment. Even if you know the fight is not going the monster's way, making a character look foolish is often worth the *dominating gaze* action. Two words: No pants.

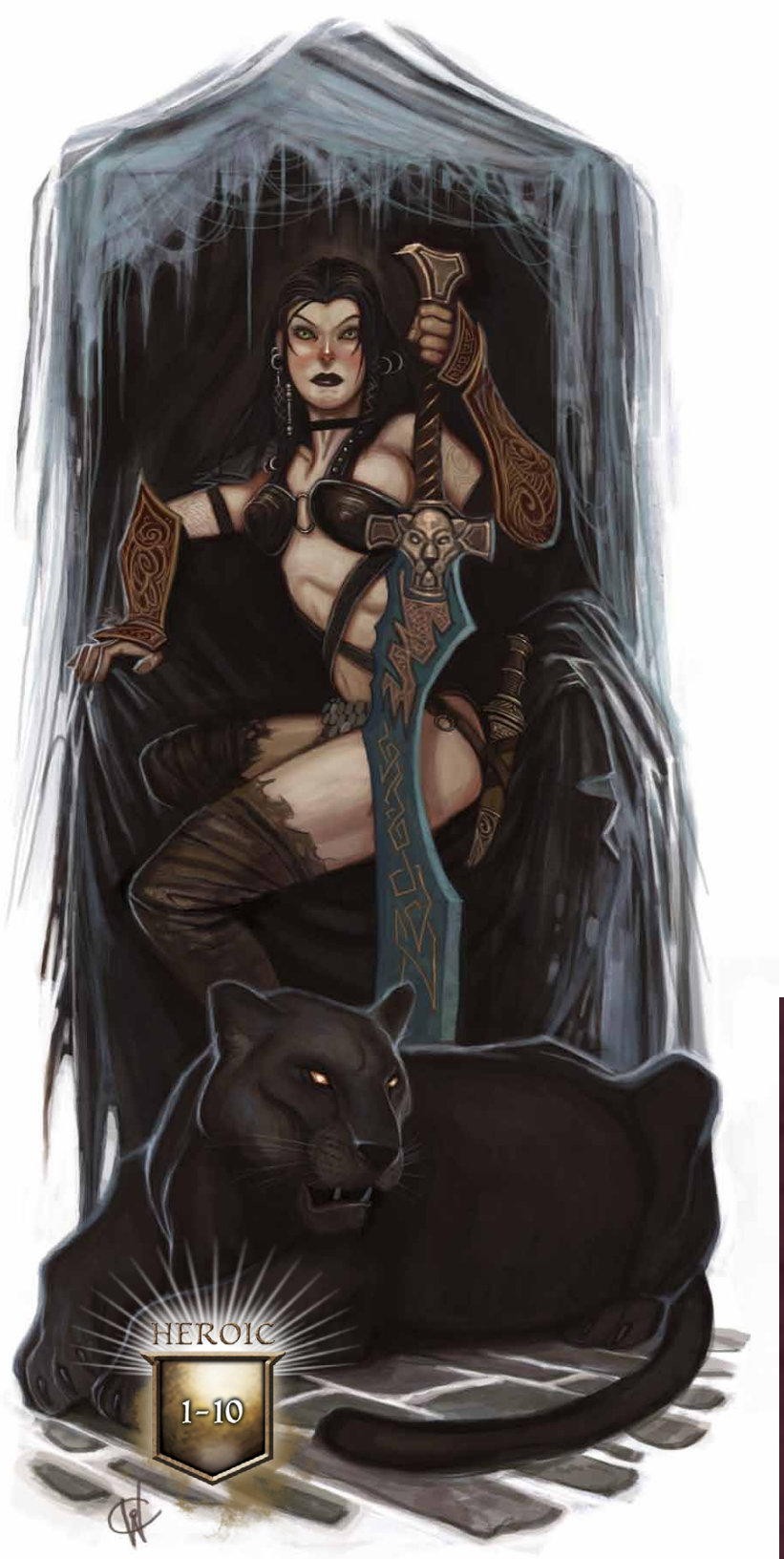
**Ettins:** OK, this is really a shout out to any multi-headed monster that can talk. You can milk an encounter for endless entertainment by creating two different personalities for your ettin heads, then have them bicker. Yes, it's a cliché, but it still works. You'll enjoy it, your players will enjoy it, everyone wins.

**The Engulfer:** The top-notch monster here is clearly (ba-dum-dum) the gelatinous cube. I ran my first 4th Edition cube at D&D Game Day two years ago. I managed to absorb four out of five characters in one encounter. Two died. It was brilliant. And the players? They loved it. I asked them to roleplay what their characters were doing in the giant Jell-O mold of a monster, and the results had us in stitches, even as the characters expired. Really, can you complain about any monster that eats people whole? A purple worm or remorhaz make for great fun too, but I still have a soft spot (these are getting bad now) for the gelatinous cube.

**Beholders:** They're classic, they're iconic, and they're scary as hell. No player likes to see one of these guys, from gauth to hive mother, appear on the table. They're just plain terrifying. I'd venture to say they might be the scariest monster in D&D. So they make the list, easily.

**The Regenerator:** My number one favorite monster is the troll. I don't know why, really. But I can tell you why they make this list: They regenerate. They're the Jason Vorhees of monsters. Knock a troll (or other regenerating monster) down and you'd better put another one in the head, or it's going to get back up and eat your spleen. The groans inspired by monsters that the players think are down and out, but aren't, make these guys pretty much unmatched in my book.

So there's my list. What's yours look like? What monsters are you always thrilled to run? Or thrilled to see in an adventure? Post your lists on the D&D Community page or send them to us at dndinsider@wizards.com!




# The Tyrant's Oath

## An Adventure for 6th-Level Characters

*By Kolja Raven Liquette*

*illustrations by William O'Connor ✦ cartography by Sean Mac Donald*

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*"The Tyrant's Oath" places a group of adventurers between two warlords struggling for dominance over the region of Elkridge; a bandit queen who has subjugated the local village and a yuan-ti occultist that transforms the villagers into snaketongue minions. The heroes must decide who to trust and form an alliance that will save the inhabitants of Elkridge.*

*The Tyrant's Oath* is designed to take five 6th-level characters to 7th level. The story offers the chance to liberate the oppressed, duel to earn favor, and participate in a siege. *The Tyrant's Oath* can be inserted into any campaign setting.

## BACKGROUND

The village of Elkridge stands near Nettleblight Swamp. In Elkridge, artisans have formed an idyllic community in a forested valley, while in Nettleblight Swamp, snaketongue cultists have carved out a lair amid poison brambles. In decades past, the residents of the village and the swamp had observed an informal truce; villagers stayed out of the swamp and cultists stayed in it. This peace was enforced by a minor warlord named Arlen Felstorm who lived in the village with his wife Vlayn and two daughters.

Then Felstorm's body was discovered, stabbed and drowned near Nettleblight Swamp. With his murder, snaketongue cultists stopped respecting the time-honored border. They have begun kidnapping villagers and corrupting them to the cult's dark purpose.

A glimmer of hope returned when a bandit queen named Skarn Felstorm and her army of outlaws entered Elkridge not long ago. They promised to protect the villagers from the cultists but demanded tribute in return. An armed standoff developed between the bandits and the cultists, with the villagers caught in between. They pay heavy tribute to the bandits; in exchange, the cultists' attacks have declined but not stopped.

All of this can be learned from villagers when the characters arrive in Elkridge.

## SYNOPSIS

The adventure begins when the heroes are ambushed by human bandits on the road to Elkridge. Before the brigands are driven off, they reveal that they answer to a bandit queen named Skarn Felstorm who has taken control of Elkridge and subjugated the inhabitants.

When the heroes explore Nettleblight Swamp, they learn how to safely negotiate the explosive pollen brambles. They also encounter a human ghost with a dagger in his back. The ghost leads them to a caravan of snaketongue cultists who are transporting human prisoners.

Saving these humans draws a host of snaketongue cultists from their temple. A human girl named Kylar then appears from the forest and offers to help the characters escape back to Elkridge.

When the heroes enter Elkridge, they are welcomed by the village healer, a woman named Vlayn. She tells them all the background facts described above, along with all of the following:

- ✦ Vlayn is Arlen Felstorm's widow.
- ✦ Vlayn's daughter Kylar entered the swamp on her own and hasn't been seen since (unless she already led the heroes out of the swamp).
- ✦ An older daughter named Skarn was exiled from the village years before by Arlen Felstorm.
- ✦ It is Skarn who now leads the bandits and exacts tribute from the villagers in exchange for a small degree of protection. She blames the villagers for her exile and sees this as her revenge.

If the heroes make their way to the fortress where Skarn and her bandits hold up, they are likely to be overwhelmed and taken in irons to the Stormbolt Highlands. If the heroes stay with Vlayn, a contingent of bandits arrives with an invitation to meet Skarn at her forced request.

The heroes must prove their worth to Skarn through gladiatorial combat. Vlayn arrives afterward, or possibly during a fight with Skarn and her bandits, to announce that Kylar has been abducted by the snaketongue cultists.

Vlayn chides Skarn for not putting aside her pride long enough to realize that the characters can guide her bandit army through Nettleblight Swamp to besiege the cultist temple.

Skarn rallies her bandit army to march against the snaketongue cultists while the heroes break through enemy lines, infiltrate the temple, and search for Kylar and the abducted villagers.

Inside the temple, Kylar is found trapped inside a yuan-ti statue. The act of releasing her drains the marshland above into the cavern and fills up the temple with murky water. A fight breaks out in the multi-tiered temple.

If the heroes deactivate the water trap, they and Kylar are drained into a lower chamber where a yuan-ti occultist is hiding with the captured villagers. Kylar is revealed to be the consort of the yuan-ti, and she aids the occultist against the heroes.

If the heroes prevail over the occultist in his sanctum, they can free the captured villagers. Skarn rallies the surviving bandits to hunt down the scattering yuan-ti and to form a proper militia that will protect rather than oppress Elkridge.

The temple that the adventurers destroy was an important place to Zehir worshippers. *The Tyrant's Oath* can have lasting consequences for the heroes if yuan-ti decide to hunt them down and punish them for their action.

## Adventure Hooks

1. The characters are tasked to curtail highway robberies near the village of Elkridge. Travelers through the area have either disappeared or been robbed of everything. The culprits are described as humans, but some had a less-than-human quality about them. After scant investigation, the party is attacked by bandits expecting easy marks laden with gold.
2. The characters may simply be traveling on a road that runs near a swamp on its way to a village . . .

## Rewards

Quite a few treasures are scattered through the adventure. These account for treasure parcels 1, 3, 4, 5, and 10 which the characters should earn on the way to 7th level. The other five parcels need to be set up and distributed by the DM. They might be rewards from Skarn Felstorm or the people of Elkridge, possessions found in the temple barracks, stolen goods stashed in shadowy corners of the snaketongue stronghold or abandoned in the marsh, or anything else the DM desires.

# Course of the Adventure

Characters can follow several paths through *The Tyrant's Oath*. All of them will cover most of the events and encounters included in the adventure.

## Village Betwixt Warlords

The isolated region of Elkridge remains beautiful and unspoiled, offering hills and lakes completely removed from the surrounding landscape (see "Remains of the Empire" in *Dungeon* #165). The roadways, however, show signs of increased traffic beyond the local inhabitants. What was once a well-kept secret has been recently discovered.

Regardless of whether the heroes are returning to Elkridge or traveling through the outskirts of the region, read the following:

*The pastoral splendor of the wilderness is filled with an eery quiet. The woodlands that run adjacent to the outer roads of Elkridge are curiously still, as if taking a deep breath. A calm has settled upon the region that is unnaturally pervasive. Its cause is not apparent.*

## Bandits on the Prowl

Characters who search for tracks along the road can discover large amounts of mounted traffic (Nature DC 10). As the characters proceed, they round a corner and see a barricade about 50 feet up the road.

*A barricade crudely constructed from downed trees spans the road. Writing has been carved into the wood, but it's not legible from this distance.*

The inscription reads: "Entering the Authority of Skarn Felstorm." Walking directly toward the barricade triggers both a trap and an ambush.

**Tactical Encounter:** "1—Bandits on the Prowl" (page 16).

**Development**

The defeated bandits carry little wealth. Their armor and weapons are new and surprisingly well made. Bandits who survive the encounter run off yelling:

*"You will regret this, outsiders! Nobody challenges the will of Skarn Felstorm without forsaking their lives!"*

At least one of the two human outriders should die fighting the characters to facilitate a story element later in the adventure. If the characters want to knock their opponents unconscious, contrive to have one outrider die from some mischance (falls onto his own weapon, trampled by a horse, etc.). If both outriders survive despite your effort, then just accept it. The Debt of Blood encounter (page 21) can still work as a Debt of Honor.

The bandits' tracks come along the road from the direction that the characters are traveling toward.

**Treasure:** Carried equipment, 20 gp per human prowler and 50 gp per human outrider.

## Peasant Abduction

Another mile or two further along, the roadway branches at the top of a ridge. One path leads down to Elkridge, nestled in a forested valley. The bandit tracks come from there, if anyone is following the tracks. One peak of the craggy hills that enclose Elkridge is crowned by a large metal sculpture. The second path leads down the opposite side of the ridge to a vast, thickly-forested swamp. The swamp forms a wide ring with a more open, reedy marsh at its center. A steep, rocky promontory rises spectacularly out of the watery waste.

If the characters continue to Elkridge, they will reach it in an hour, as night begins to fall. Homes are scattered across the valley rather than centralized in one place, but a group of agitated humans has assembled in what passes for the center of town.

On seeing a group of heavily-armed strangers, parents protectively hold their children. A woman carrying a torch rides out on horseback to meet the characters. She appears surprised when she does not recognize their faces.

*"You're not the patrol. Neither are you snaketongue cultists. Your arrival is either foretelling or fortuitous. Some of our friends and neighbors have been kidnapped by cultists, and the bandits who are paid to keep us safe are nowhere to be found. What brings such well-armed travelers to Elkridge this night?"*

If the characters greet the woman warmly and explain their purpose, then she introduces herself as Vlayn, the villager healer. If they agree to help retrieve the missing villagers, Vlayn leads the party to a cluster of homes where the abduction took place.

*"The snaketongues headed toward Nettleblight Swamp, but their lizards are slowed by carrying the kidnapped victims. If you have the skill, please track them now. Time is against us. My daughter, Kylar, already pursues the cultists on foot. She is brave and strong, but she is but one young woman and they are many."*

Anyone trained in Insight can tell that Vlayn is concerned about the villagers but very afraid of what might happen to her daughter. She won't come with the characters if asked; she must tend to villagers who were injured in the attack.

Finding and following the tracks of snaketongue cultists and their giant lizards requires only a DC 10 Nature check. The tracks lead toward the swamp spotted earlier. Characters catch sight of their quarry by the last light of day, just before the raiders disappear into Nettleblight Swamp.

**Quest XP:** The task of saving the villagers who have been abducted, including those trapped in the snaketongue cultist temple, rewards each character with 250 XP. As well, a sturdy homestead will be built for the party on Elkridge land, and the ghost of Arlen Felstorm will gift the characters with a *phantom soldier* (*Adventurer's Vault*, page 175) if they permanently defeat the yuan-ti occultist.

## Braving Nettleblight Swamp

Whether the characters travel to Nettleblight Swamp before or after Elkridge, they can find and follow the tracks of snaketongue cultists and their giant lizards (as detailed in "Peasant Abduction"). These tracks can be followed easily (DC 10) from the village to the edge of Nettleblight Swamp, but there the DC increases to 15. Almost immediately after entering the swamp, each character is attacked by explosive pollen bramble.

Until the characters identify and select a countermeasure to the explosive pollen brambles, they will be attacked by it once per minute that they spend in the swamp. The ring of swamp surrounding the marsh is at least a half-mile wide.

## Spirit in the Slough

After the heroes identify the hazard, the character with the highest Perception skill notices a radiant light in the distance. Moving closer to this light reveals the translucent shape of a soaking-wet man in mail armor, carrying a large shield, and wielding a longsword. The characters have no way to recognize this apparition, but it is the ghost of Arlen Felstorm.

If the characters approach the ghost, Felstorm nods expressionlessly to the heroes, then turns to walk away, revealing a uniquely curved dagger buried in his back. He strides through the swamp, frequently disappearing in the dense growth only to reappear in the distance. He always stays ahead of the party. If characters follow, the ghost guides them to the snaketongue cultists, points to the creatures, and disappears.

**Development**

Regardless of whether the characters followed the tracks of snaketongue cultists or were led through the swamp by the ghost, they reach a shallow, sluggish river where the swamp transitions into marshland, the explosive pollen bramble stops growing, and the snaketongue cultists are spotted.

| **Explosive Pollen Bramble Hazard** | **Level 6 Lurker XP 250** |
|---|---|
| *The nettles and thistles discharge yellow pollen that billows into a toxic cloud.* | |
| **Hazard:** An explosive pollen bramble fills a square that is treated as difficult terrain. When triggered, it releases a cloud of yellow pollen. | |
| **Perception** | |
| Characters cannot use Perception to detect this hazard. It is indistinguishable from regular brambles. | |
| **Additional Skills:** Arcana or Nature | |
| ✦ DC 17 (Nature): A character identifies explosive pollen bramble and can discern the hazard from regular brambles. | |
| ✦ DC 13 (Arcana): A character senses the presence of magic in explosive pollen brambles. | |
| **Trigger** | |
| The explosive pollen bramble attacks immediately when a creature enters a square it occupies. | |
| **Attack** | |
| Immediate Reaction | Close burst 1, centered on the disturbed square |
| *Target:* Each creature in burst | |
| *Attack:* + 11 vs. Fortitude | |
| *Hit:* Ongoing 10 poison damage (save ends). | |
| *Aftereffect:* The target is slowed (save ends). | |
| **Countermeasures** | |
| ✦ A character can travel safely by avoiding all dangerous-looking brambles, but Speed is reduced to 2. | |
| ✦ A character can burn, cut down, or otherwise destroy dangerous-looking bramble from at least 1 square away with a standard action, but Speed is reduced to 2. | |
| ✦ A character who identified explosive pollen bramble with a Nature check or sensed the presence of magic in in the plants with an Arcana check can safely travel through Nettleblight Swamp, but Speed is reduced by 2. | |

## March of the Snaketongue

If the characters explored the swamp before visiting Elkridge, or pursued the raiders immediately during the night, then they catch up to the snaketongue convoy at the river. If they waited until day to enter the swamp, the raiders have already made it back to their stronghold. In that case, the tactical encounter can be with a snaketongue patrol or another group of outward-bound raiders instead; adjust the encounter accordingly.

At night, the first figure in the column carries an ignited sunrod for the others to follow. The cultists were stalled at the river, where they needed time to reorganize their balky lizards.

Characters can see the snaketongue stronghold from the edge of the forest. During the day, details are clearly visible. At night, most of what the characters see will be illuminated by torches or sunrods, and the shape of the promontory can be picked out as a dark silhouette against the moon and stars.

*At the river, the swamp transitions into a vast marshland about 2 miles across. A towering promontory of rock dominates its center. At this range, you can just see a broad set of carved stairs that leads from the base up to a roughly hewn opening. Snakelike creatures enter and exit through this fissure, and many more stand guard outside. Snaketongue warriors on giant lizards glide over the marsh as they make wide patrols.*

If the characters are on the trail of the raider convoy, add the following:

*The convoy of cultists and their human prisoners is crossing the river and moving toward the outcropping.*

**Tactical Encounter:** "2–March of the Snaketongue" (page 18).

**Development**

The rescued human villagers are still in grave danger from snaketongue archers and patrollers. The characters would do well to retreat quickly out of Nettleblight Swamp with Kylar as their guide.

About halfway through the ring of swamp, the heroes should realize that they are not being pursued by the snaketongue cultists. A DC 12 Nature check or DC 17 Insight check can sense that the cultists would not have lost the villagers' trail in the swamp, which means they probably allowed the fugitives to escape.

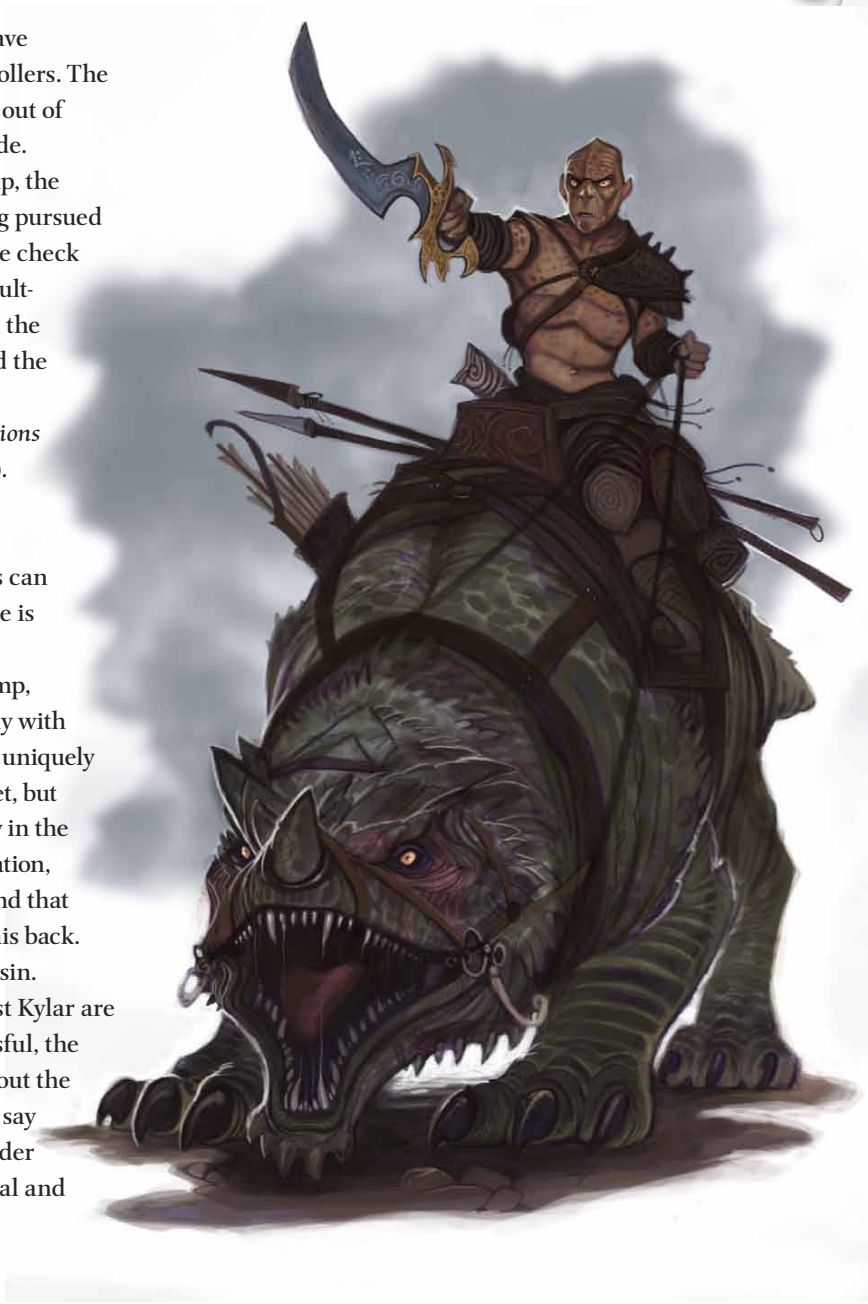
**Treasure:** Carried equipment and 2 *potions of vigor* (level 9, *Adventurer's Vault* page 189).

## Courageous Retreat

On the trip back to Elkridge, the characters can talk to the girl who helped them escape. She is Kylar, daughter of Vlayn.

If asked about her knowledge of the swamp, she admits to patrolling the region frequently with her father before he died. If asked about the uniquely curved dagger she carries, she becomes quiet, but characters recognize it as the blade they saw in the ghost's back. If confronted with that information, Kylar admits that the ghost was her father and that she found him murdered with the knife in his back. She kept the weapon to use against his assassin.

Active and passive Insight checks against Kylar are opposed by her Bluff check (+12). If successful, the characters sense that Kylar knows more about the dagger than she is revealing. She refuses to say more, explaining only that her father's murder and her quest for vengeance are too personal and painful to discuss with strangers.



## Development

If the characters return to Elkridge, then Vlayn and the villagers welcome the heroes and the rescued captives. If the characters are visiting Elkridge for the first time, they meet Vlayn and the villagers in the center of town, where they are welcomed as heroes for saving the abducted villagers.

During this time, the characters notice a few stoic villagers who do not appear impressed. They sense a mixture of fear and scorn from these peasants. As these villagers will not speak to the heroes, Vlayn explains their behavior.

*"The bodies of several bandits were found on the road. Nobody is blaming you for defending yourselves, but people fear what will befall Elkridge if we offer you shelter. I don't share their fears."*

If the characters ask why Vlayn doesn't fear the bandits, she answers directly.

*"Because Skarn is my daughter and Kylar's older sister."*

Vlayn offers to explain everything but only after she tends the rescued villagers. During this time, the characters can acquaint themselves with Elkridge and purchase limited quantities of mundane gear.

If the characters follow the stoic villagers, they split up into five groups. One of them treks a mile northeast of Elkridge. Here the villager calls out to a human sentinel in the trees, whom he tells about the strangers in town. The sentinel climbs down, mounts a horse concealed a short distance away, and races toward the Stormbolt Highlands. If the characters try to follow this human outrider, see "Mounted Escort" (page 10).

## Family Felstorm Rumors

Characters can learn the following information through conversations with the villagers. Some people will offer this information openly. Others might be more furtive, as if they're afraid to pass along secrets about the Felstorm sisters.

- ✦ Arlen Felstorm, a retired human warlord, protected Elkridge up until his death. He crafted the bronze symbol of Kord atop a nearby mountain and married Vlayn, producing two daughters. The sisters, Kylar and Skarn, were inseparable.
- ✦ Growing up, Skarn fell in with a group of scoundrels. When Felstorm saved a merchant from bandits, he found Skarn among the outlaws. The unforgiving warlord exiled his daughter.
- ✦ Arlen Felstorm fought tirelessly to secure the autonomy of Elkridge from any ruler. When he was found stabbed and drowned at the edge of the swamp, Skarn returned to take his place, albeit by force of arms and as a formidable bandit queen.
- ✦ Skarn is fiercely protective of her younger sister, Kylar, who looks up to and idolizes her older sibling. Skarn is a tough character, more like her father in disposition than her mother Vlayn. Kylar has run wild ever since her father died, but she hasn't yet joined with the bandits.

## Healer of Elkridge

Inside her cottage, Vlayn is revealed to be a primal healer with a storehouse of dried plants, herbs, and roots. Vlayn has mastered several rituals and alchemical processes, all of which she is willing to perform for the characters' benefit or share with them.

**Treasure:** Vlayn has the alchemical formulas *antivenom*, *beastbane*, *clearsense powder*, *clearwater solution*, and *herbal poultice* (*Adventurer's Vault*) and the rituals Banish Vermin (*Dragon* #366), Commune with Nature, Cure Disease, Delay Affliction (*Dragon* #366), and Gentle Repose (*Player's Handbook*) in her ritual book.

## What Has Come Before

Vlayn offers to house the characters for as long as they need to stay in Elkridge.

She explains that while the snaketongue cultists have long occupied Nettleblight Swamp, they only began abducting villagers after her husband was killed. The snaketongue cultists have grown in number as villagers have disappeared, including Mavros, the former mayor of Elkridge (see Remains of the Empire in *Dungeon* #165 for more details).

With the exception of Kylar prowling the old border, nothing has been done to stop the abductions. Without Arlen Felstorm to lead it, the village militia disbanded. No one remaining in the village commands enough respect to assume command. With Skarn's return as a bandit queen in command of a small army, there seemed no need for the militia. But Skarn turned out to be as much a curse as a blessing. She forced the artisan community to make armor and weapons for her followers and took possession of the Stormbolt Highlands, where she pressed villagers into constructing a wooden fortress.

The bandits that follow Skarn offer some protection to Elkridge from the snaketongue cultists, but her guards are lax and too few to attack the snaketongue temple. At the same time, the bandits themselves prey on the villagers, although their demands and "liberties" are less atrocious than those of the swamp raiders.

A DC 13 Insight checks senses that while Vlayn is not lying, she excluded parts of the story regarding Skarn. Other villagers can fill in the gaps as noted above under "Family Felstorm Rumors."

## Mounted Escort

At an appropriate time after the kidnapped villagers have been rescued, human toughs ride into town and start terrorizing villagers.

*Hoof beats echo between cottages as mounted ruffians pound on doors. "We know they're here! Tell us where and spare yourselves a beating you won't forget!"*

The ruffians pull peasants from their homes, drag them into the center of Elkridge, and threaten to beat information out of them. The threats turn quickly to action.

If the characters left town immediately and headed toward the Stormbolt Highlands, then they'll be spotted by bandit sentinels who alert the stronghold with signal arrows. Characters with passive Perception scores of 17 or higher notice these arrows arcing over the trees and may be able to track down their sources. Avoiding being spotted by the sentinels can be done only if the characters take extensive safety measures, such as circling around the highlands to approach from opposite the valley or sending a lone scout into the woods to reconnoiter a safe, unobserved path. Either of those tactics will take the better part of a day to complete.

If any human sentinels are cornered, treat them as human prowlers trained in Perception instead of Stealth. They can be detected in the forest with DC 25 Perception checks—if someone is specifically looking for them in the right area. Replace their short bows with long bows and normal arrows with signal arrows.

Regardless of whether the mounted human toughs are met in Elkridge, the forest, or in the Stormbolt Highland fortress, it leads to the "Mounted Escort" encounter.

**Tactical Encounter:** "3—Mounted Escort" (page 20).

**Development**

The characters do not need to fight the mounted escort but are goaded to trade blows. The human toughs will deride the heroes if they do not fight with comments like, "If I knew we were escorting kittens, I would have brought a basket in which to carry them!" If the majority of human toughs have been bloodied in a fight but before any have been killed, they submit to the characters as guides rather than captors.

## Audience with a Tyrant

As the characters are escorted or guided to the Stormbolt Highland fortress, 3 miles northeast of Elkridge, numerous bandit prowlers and mounted outriders appear from hiding to seal off the characters' retreat with an additional angry mob.

If the characters ascend the Stormbolt Highlands undetected, the only way into the fortress is by impersonating bandits. There are far too many outlaws around to attempt a group Stealth check.

Regardless of how the characters approach the Stormbolt Highland fortress, read the following:

*The forest opens onto a rocky plateau overlooking the region, revealing a recently built wooden fortress. There are barracks, smithies, stables, a great hall, even a mine. Guards, both mounted and on foot, patrol the perimeter. The camp is enclosed by a wall of sharpened wooden pickets. Most of the surrounding trees have been cut down to build the fortress, but enough remain to hide the structure from a distance. A stairway carved out of the mountain winds up the steep slope to the sculpture of a bronze fist that rests atop a peak. Men, women, and children are at work in the camp.*

Anyone trained in Religion recognizes the sculpture as the symbol of Kord.

Every structure in the fortress is occupied with human bandits. If the characters are here at Skarn's invitation, they will be taken to the great hall surrounded by a crowd.

If the characters try to infiltrate the fortress in disguise, everyone must make a DC 17 Bluff check. This is not a group check; characters succeed or fail individually. Anyone who fails is accosted by guards. How other characters react to that is up to the individual players. If a fight breaks out, use the NPC statistics from "Mounted Escort" (page 20).

Regardless of whether the heroes are captured or escorted here, they are taken to the great hall. Characters who snuck in might suddenly throw off their cloaks and demand to see Skarn, try to sneak into the great hall, or who-knows-what else. Ultimately, however, everything of importance that happens in the bandit camp happens in the great hall.

*The great hall is warmed with two enormous hearths and adorned with ill-gotten furs and tapestries. Four long rows of harvest tables and benches span the room from front to back. Across the front of the hall is a wide platform. A wooden throne sits atop the platform, and a stunning, full-bodied woman clad in scale armor reclines confidently on the throne. She is attended by two exotic cats, five brawny men, and twenty rough brigands. The men stand resolute in their contempt, while the woman is piqued by your entrance.*

The woman is Skarn Felstorm, a human blade of Kord. The two exotic cats are fey panthers, the five brawny men are human ambushers, and the twenty brigands are human prowlers.

Be sure the players understand that they are hopelessly overmatched by this bandit host. Attacking Skarn in her own hall would be the height of foolishness. If anyone tries, there's no reason the crowd won't beat them down to 0 hit points and lock them up.

*"I am Skarn Felstorm, and you have become quite the thorn in my side. My men advised against bringing you to my home. One even suggested slaughtering you outright. I consider such behavior unworthy of Kord. Besides, after hearing how you dispatched my men at the roadblock, I had to see the thorn for myself. Now that we stand face to face, I ask—why shouldn't I pluck this thorn and cast it aside? Why should I spare your lives? What can I or my people gain by extending you mercy?"*

The interaction with Skarn is a perfect opportunity for roleplaying. Skarn has been looking forward to meeting the characters. She is gregarious, hearty, arrogant, flirtatious, even sensual. She has no patience for flowery words and she sees right through flattery (although she does enjoy it). The bandits in the hall laugh at all her jokes and jeer whenever she sneers at the strangers. Skarn is the archetypal haughty bandit queen; play your role to the hilt.

She is not, however, blind to the opportunity the characters represent. Skarn didn't become queen of the bandits by being beautiful. She is also ambitious and wily. She knows only too well how dangerous the snaketongue cultists are becoming and that they must be crushed somehow. Despite her exile, she feels great pain over the murder of her father. She loves her sister and mother and doesn't like seeing the people of Elkridge mistreated, but the bandits would be impossible to command if they were kept under too much control. The current balance of terror is the best she can engineer under the circumstances.

Skarn's concern for Elkridge and her desire to destroy the cultists are the characters' advantage. If the heroes describe their fight against the cultists or mention that they can safely traverse Nettleblight Swamp (by identifying and avoiding the explosive pollen brambles), they have Skarn's full attention.

Regardless of how well the characters comport themselves, Skarn must appease the bandits under her command. Eventually, she makes the following speech.

*"Hear me bandits! I care little for wild boasts or claims of bravery. Every member of this clanhold has proven themselves in deed; every member is the extension of one beating heart, and that heart's blood has been spilled. We must have satisfaction for that injury . . . not with apologetic words, but with the spilling of their blood! Our fellows died in battle against these strangers, and died well. Before these outsiders can stand among us, they must pass the judgment of combat. You know of what I speak. Ready the pit!"*

## Debt of Blood

With a cheer, the men and women in the great hall begin pulling up floor boards and quickly reveal an ingeniously concealed gladiatorial arena, 35 feet square and sunk 10 feet into the ground beneath the hall. The five human ambushers who share the podium with Skarn do not prepare the arena but ready themselves for battle.

Four training posts fixed with sharp blades and spiked flails are spaced in the arena. Four turnstiles are brought out of storage and socketed into the floor around the arena. When manually operated, they cause the training posts to spin. Setting up the arena takes about half an hour.

Declining the judgment of arms is not an option. The mob in the great hall wants to see blood, and one way or another, it will.

**Tactical Encounter:** "4—Debt of Blood" (page 21).

**Development**

If the characters defeat Skarn's champions, they are inducted into the Stormbolt Highland Clan as honored members, whether they like it or not. Defeated bandits relinquish their gear to the characters as spoils. If any human ambushers are killed, their families and lodgings are included in the winnings. Likewise, characters who are defeated must relinquish their gear. Forfeited equipment can be ransomed back at 100% of its basic price; the cost of magical enhancement is not included (i.e., equipment is ransomed as if it is not magical). Gear must be returned if the defeated foe can pay the price.

If the characters are clearly losing against the human ambushers or a battle erupts between the heroes, Skarn, and all of her men, you can salvage the situation by having Vlayn gallop into the great hall on an exhausted horse and yell a message to Skarn; see "A Mother's Scorn," below.

**Treasure:** The ambushers' carried equipment, level 8 *manticore spiked shield* (*Adventurer's Vault* page 118).

## A Mother's Scorn

Vlayn appears on an exhausted horse, an untreated cut bleeding on her forehead. She rides unopposed into the great hall and angrily addresses Skarn.

*"Kylar has been abducted by the cultists! If you ever planned to do something with your bandit army, now is the time. You want to be a leader? Put your pride aside and let these heroes guide your men through Nettleblight Swamp! Lay the ghost of your father to rest, Skarn. End these cultists and save your sister before it's too late!"*

Vlayn relates a tale in which she and Kylar were attacked in her cottage by two snaketongue assassins with uniquely curved daggers. They grabbed Kylar and ran into the forest. Anyone trained in Insight can tell that Vlayn is telling the truth.

If the characters return to her cottage, two sets of tracks can be found running into the forest (Perception, DC 20). They are eventually joined by one more, all moving in unison toward Nettleblight Swamp.

Skarn marches onto the promenade of her fortress. Every man, woman, and child stops to listen. She declares the heroes trusted allies, states that she plans to commune with Kord atop the Stormbolt Highland mountain, and rallies the bandits to arm themselves against the snaketongue temple, because they will be riding out in force on her return. The fortress roars in anticipation of battle. Skarn heads for the stairway that twists up the mountain. She welcomes the characters to join her on this hour-long climb.

## The Cradle of Kord

If the heroes follow Skarn up the mountain, she leads them to an open-air shrine where a giant symbol of Kord has been cast in bronze. Skarn kneels before the statue and speaks:

*"Kord, I kneel before you at the temple of my father, humble but also enraged that the land he protected is despoiled by followers of Zehir. I ask you to cross blades with the snake god and favor my men as we ride into battle against his zealots. To that end, I pledge the glory of our brave deeds to your fearless courage and offer these heroes as vessels that may bring your vast might to bear. Let my silence be filled with their words."*

Storm clouds form over the Stormbolt Highlands as Skarn kneels in prayer, fullblade in hand. If the heroes appeal to the storm god of battle, each character roleplays their contribution and makes a DC 12 Religion check. If at least half of the party succeed, read the following.

*The storm clouds darken, rumble with thunder, and flash with lightning. A fork of blue light strikes the metal sculpture, and then another, followed by several more too quick to count, until the bronze fist becomes a glowing nexus of electricity. In the moments between bolts of lightning, the ghost of Arlen Felstorm appears where Skarn stands and the two seem to trade places. They invite you to touch the illuminated symbol.*

Those who touch the sculpture either regain 1 healing surge or gain 1 temporary healing surge until the end of their next extended rest.

If the entire party succeeded at the Religion check or their roleplaying was inspired, a torrential rain blankets the region. While this rain continues, the explosive pollen bramble hazard is nullified.

The rain produced by this divine storm counts as one automatic success toward the "When Armies Collide" skill challenge.

## When Armies Collide

The characters return to the fortress, where Skarn climbs atop a prepared horse and wordlessly leads her army out of the Stormbolt Highlands. If the characters have mounts, they will have been prepared as well.

When the bandit army arrives at Nettleblight Swamp, the heroes can safely guide it through the quagmire, avoiding the explosive poison bramble hazard. If the characters summoned a storm at the Cradle of Kord, inclement rain makes avoiding the hazard unnecessary.

Soon the occultist temple looms in the distance, and it's clear that the cultists are on full alert. An overwhelming force of snaketongue cultists stands ready to battle the army Skarn has marshaled. The siege will be engaged and fought without surprise.

**Skill Challenge:** "5: When Armies Collide" (page 24).

**Development**

Once the skill challenge is over, the characters immediately enter the temple. Whether they are allowed a short rest at the entrance depends on their success or failure in the skill challenge.

## Fangs of the Snake

If the characters enter the promontory fissure, they travel down a steep, coiled tunnel that emerges into a domed room.

*The tunnel opens into a cavernous dome where a giant snake skull hangs over the entrance. To the left and right, on opposing sides of the sloping walls, three levels of timbered catwalks have been built. Each level provides access to ten barracks mined out of the rock. A circular arena bordered by wooden pillars occupies the center of the floor, in which archery targets and training posts are spaced. A ring of Draconic runes ten feet across is inscribed in the middle of this arena. Against the furthest wall stands a massive, three-story statue of a creature whose entire body is intertwined snakes, meticulously carved from the cavern wall.*

A DC 22 Arcana check identifies the giant snake skull as belonging to the *skull watch* ritual with the warding category (*Open Grave* page 50). The yuan-ti occultist of the temple configured the skull to alert him if creatures other than snaketongue cultists enter the temple (if characters enter stealthily, the skull 'perceives' with Perception +13).

A DC 25 Nature check recognizes the statue as a yuan-ti anathema. Characters trained in Religion recognize symbols of Zehir, the god of darkness, poison, and serpents, throughout the cavern.

Any character who speaks Draconic can read the runes inscribed on the arena floor. "*For the serpent we train, by his mercy we live, unto the snake we become.*" If the temple floor is searched, a DC 17 Dungeoneering check determines that the floor within the Draconic runes is designed to retract via some remote mechanism.

The heroes eventually hear Kylar's voice calling out from within the statue.

*"Can anyone hear me? I'm trapped in the snake statue!"*

Characters near the statue can talk to Kylar. She explains that she was kidnapped and locked behind a stone gate which is activated by moving one of the statue's many snake heads. Active and passive Insight checks against Kylar are opposed by her Bluff check (+12) with an additional +5 bonus (for being concealed behind the stone gate). Successful Insight checks give characters a sense that Kylar is lying about something.

An examination of the statue reveals that five of the sculpted snake heads have closed mouths, while the hundreds of others are hissing or snarling. These five snake heads can be pulled out, turned, and pushed back into different positions. Regardless of how they are adjusted, the stone gate trapping Kylar drops into the floor. At the same time, another stone gate rises up and seals the entrance to this chamber.

*The sound of an enormous stone wheel can be heard overhead, rolling into an unseen socket within the wall. A thunderous boom shakes the cavern, followed by a gout of marsh water spewing from the alcove in which Kylar stands, and then from every snarling and hissing stone mouth that comprises the statue of the snake-creature.*

The marsh water fills the dome at the rate of 1 foot per round during the first 15 rounds, 2 feet per round during the next 10 rounds, and 3 feet per round during the next 5 rounds. At that point, the chamber is entirely flooded to its 50-foot ceiling.

The effect of this water trap is described fully in the tactical encounter, "Fangs of the Snake" (page 25).

**Tactical Encounter:** "6—Fangs of the Snake" (page 25).

**Skill Challenge:** "7—Close the Valve" (page 28).

**Development**

If the gate behind which Kylar was trapped is explored, two passageways are discovered. The first is 1 square wide and moves diagonally up through the statue into the snake's head, where it opens atop the statue. The second is 10 feet square and climbs 100 feet straight up through a manufactured floodgate to the surface. While water is spewing into the chamber, the downward force of the water makes the sluiceway impassable. Once the chamber is completely flooded, characters can swim up or down the shaft normally (DC 10 for the calm water). When the gate is closed and the water drained, the shaft can be climbed with a DC 25 Athletics check.

Completing the "Close the Valve" skill challenge opens a sink hole 10 feet across in the center of the arena. All of the water drains into the chamber below. When draining, the water level drops 10 feet per round until the depth is 12 feet. It then slows to 2 feet per round until the chamber is drained.

Once the water level is down to 12 feet, the draining water creates a dangerous whirlpool in the center of the room. Every character in the water is pulled 4 squares toward the center of the room at the start of his or her turn. Then the character must make an Athletics check at DC 15 in order to swim or tread water, according to the standard swimming rules (*Player's Handbook* page 183). A character that is pulled into one of the center four squares of the chamber is washed down into the cavern below (see "Belly of the Snake"). This fall causes 2d10 damage, which can be reduced with a trained Acrobatics skill check (*Player's Handbook* page 181).

Instead of trying to swim away from the current, characters might also try to grab onto catwalks, pillars, archery targets, or training posts within reach. This is a standard action requiring only a DC 12 Athletics check, provided the character is on or adjacent to a suitable, solid fixture. Maintaining the grab is a minor action, but the character is considered restrained while doing so.

Kylar wants to be pulled through the drain as quickly as possible. Be sure that she is near it during the skill challenge.

The whirlpool stops pulling characters once the water level drops to 4 feet.

Draining the room doesn't necessarily end the battle. It's likely that not all of the snaketongue cultists will be killed or washed into the lower chamber, so the characters probably still have a fight to finish.

After the last cultists are mopped up and the room is drained, anyone still in this chamber can rest here and figure out how to operate the control panel of snake-head levers in the statue where the snaketongue celebrant was hiding. This panel opens and closes the drain hole to the chamber below. The controls at the statue base open and close the sluiceway and floodgate.

**Treasure:** Carried equipment, level 8 *sash of ensnarement* (*Adventurer's Vault* page 166), and 3 *whetstones of venom* (level 9).

## Belly of the Snake

If the draining water sent the characters down through the sink hole or the snaketongue control panel was figured out, the party gains access to a lower chamber.

*The lower cavern is shaped like the bottom half of an hourglass, thin at the top and widening at the bottom, with a narrow set of stairs that coils downward, counterclockwise around the ever-widening cavern wall. The chamber is flooded with water drained from the room above, and the sound of flowing water indicates the presence of an underground river. The stairs descend to a platform just a few feet above the water. In the wall next to the platform, a doorway opens into an adjoining room with a marble floor and four life-sized yuan-ti statues.*

The tactical encounter "Belly of the Snake" begins as soon as characters reach the bottom of the winding stairs.

**Tactical Encounter:** "8—Belly of the Snake" (page 28).

**Development**

If Sacharlim is defeated, the characters can take a short rest and figure out how to operate the control panel in his sanctum. This control panel is a master to the two above. It can control the surface gate that floods the temple and the hole that drains the temple into the underground river.

**Treasure:** Carried equipment, *hat of disguise* (*Adventurer's Vault* page 142).

## Aftermath

The sanctum of Sacharlim is filled with tomes about magic and the god Zehir. A locked, crusty chest is sitting on the bottom of the water-filled cavern under 20 feet of water. If a player declares that they're inspecting that still-flooded part of the complex, then a DC 23 Perception check notices 'something odd' beneath the water. A character searching from underwater spots the chest with a DC 15 Perception or Nature check. The chest is the focus of Sacharlim's Leomund's Secret Chest ritual. It holds coins and a ritual book containing Consult Mystic Sages, Skull Watch, and Water Breathing.

The cells hold 20 villagers who were kidnapped from Elkridge. Saving them earns the quest reward and all the associated benefits offered by Elkridge. If Kylar is still alive, she can be released to Skarn and Vlayn and whatever punishment or rehabilitation they concoct.

With the cultist threat removed, Skarn persuades her bandits to settle in Elkridge and form the core of its new militia. The Stormbolt Highland fortress becomes the base for a mining operation. Skarn has the marsh floodgate destroyed so that the entire underground temple complex is flooded and choked with mud.

If Sacharlim is slain, the ghost of Arlen Felstorm will visit the characters as they leave Elkridge and present them with a *phantom soldier* embodying his spiritual essence (*Adventurer's Vault*). If Sacharlim manages to escape by hiding in the cavern, swimming out through the underground river, or using his *hat of disguise*, he is sure to return and seek bloody vengeance against Elkridge and the player characters.

# 1—Bandits on the Prowl

**Encounter Level 5 (1,000 XP)**

## Setup

**2 human outriders** (O)
**10 human prowlers** (P)

A group of bandits ambushes the characters to steal their coin and valuables. They mean to box in the characters between a constructed barricade and the obstacle created by a Falling Log Barrier trap.

## Tactics

The human prowlers crouch in cover within a move action of the Falling Log Barrier trap. The human outriders are close by as well, but further back in the trees to conceal their horses (10 squares away). A DC 20 Perception check will spot someone hiding in the trees or near the barricade. The trap can also be spotted, as noted in its description.

This ambush was designed to trap slow merchant wagons, not adventurers who are ready for a fight. In theory, the falling logs trap a wagon and bandits overwhelm it before passengers realize what's happening. The bandits will try the same thing here, but it's unlikely to work.

After the Falling Log Barrier trap is activated or circumvented, three human prowlers and one human outrider close in on both sides of the road, meaning to box in the characters between the fallen logs and barricade. They stand with weapons ready but don't attack immediately. The four remaining prowlers stay behind the barricade with their shortbows ready. An outrider speaks for them.

*"By the will of Skarn, lay down your arms and hand over your coins! Do it quickly or we'll make up your minds up for you . . . and dash them on the ground!"*

If the characters did not trigger the Falling Log Barrier, then the first bandit to activate triggers the trap with an arrow loosed into the trees above.

At the beginning of this encounter, the bandits still believe they have the upper hand. Their goal is to intimidate and rob the characters, not kill them. They don't attack until the characters do; instead, if bandits go before the characters, they ready actions to attack if the adventurers do.

The bandits fight only until the first human outrider is bloodied or all the human prowlers are killed. At that point, surviving outriders try to gallop away to warn Skarn while prowlers left behind try to buy time for the escaping horsemen.

**2 Human Outriders (O)** — **Level 6 Skirmisher**
**Medium natural humanoid** — **XP 250 each**

**Initiative** +9 **Senses** Perception +10
**HP** 74; **Bloodied** 37
**AC** 20; **Fortitude** 19, **Reflex** 19, **Will** 17
**Speed** 8

**Longsword** (standard, at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
+11 vs. AC; 1d8 + 6 damage, plus 1d8 damage on charge attacks.

**Trample** (standard, at-will)
The human outrider moves its speed and can enter enemies' spaces. The outrider makes an attack; +9 vs. Reflex; 1d6 + 6 damage, and the target is knocked prone.

**Mobile Melee Attack** (standard, at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
The human outrider moves half its speed and makes one melee basic attack during the move. It doesn't provoke opportunity attacks while moving away from the target.

**Alignment** Unaligned **Languages** Common
**Skills** Athletics +12
**Str** 19 (+7) **Dex** 18 (+7) **Wis** 14 (+5)
**Con** 18 (+7) **Int** 15 (+5) **Cha** 10 (+3)
**Equipment** leather armor, longsword

**10 Human Prowlers (P)** — **Level 5 Minion Skirmisher**
**Medium natural humanoid** — **XP 50 each**

**Initiative** +5 **Senses** Perception +3
**HP** 1; a missed attack never damages a minion.
**AC** 19; **Fortitude** 16, **Reflex** 17, **Will** 15
**Speed** 6

**Longsword** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
+10 vs. AC; 6 damage.

**Shortbow** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
Range 15/30; +8 vs. AC; 6 damage.

**Flanking Step** (move; at-will)
The human prowler shifts 2 squares.

**Alignment** Unaligned **Languages** Common
**Skills** Stealth +10
**Str** 14 (+4) **Dex** 16 (+5) **Wis** 12 (+3)
**Con** 12 (+3) **Int** 10 (+2) **Cha** 10 (+2)
**Equipment** Leather armor, longsword, shortbow, 30 arrows

**Falling Log Barrier Trap** — **Level 5 Obstacle XP 200**

*Several logs have been hoisted above the forest road and hidden within a canopy of branches to be dropped as an obstruction.*

**Trap:** The logs tumble onto the road below and become an impassible obstacle for carts and wagons.

**Perception**

- ✦ DC 12: The character who looks up notices that several branches have been gathered together.
- ✦ DC 17: The character who looks up notices that a score of logs have been suspended above the gathered branches.
- ✦ DC 17: The character notices a length of rope buried under the dirt.

**Additional Skill: Nature**

- ✦ DC 17: The character who looks up notices that the tree canopy has grown unnaturally.

**Trigger**

When a creature moves across the trip rope hidden under the road, the trap activates.

**Attack**

Immediate Interrupt — Close burst 2

*Target:* Creatures in burst

*Attack:* +10 vs. Reflex

*Hit:* 2d10 + 6 damage and the target is immobilized (save ends).

*Miss:* Half damage and the target is immobilized until the end of its next turn.

*Effect:* Any creature caught in the burst area (shown on the map) is attacked by the trap. After the logs fall, the burst area remains an impassible barrier for carts and wagons until cleared.

**Countermeasures**

- ✦ A character who notices the trip rope can easily avoid it by stepping over.
- ✦ An adjacent character can disable the trip rope without causing the suspended logs to fall (Thievery DC 17).
- ✦ A character can attack the rope used to suspend the logs, causing them to fall prematurely (AC 10, HP 5).
- ✦ A character can leap over the fallen logs, which are 25 feet across and 5 feet high at the highest point.

## Features of the Area

**Illumination:** Bright light during day, dim light at night.

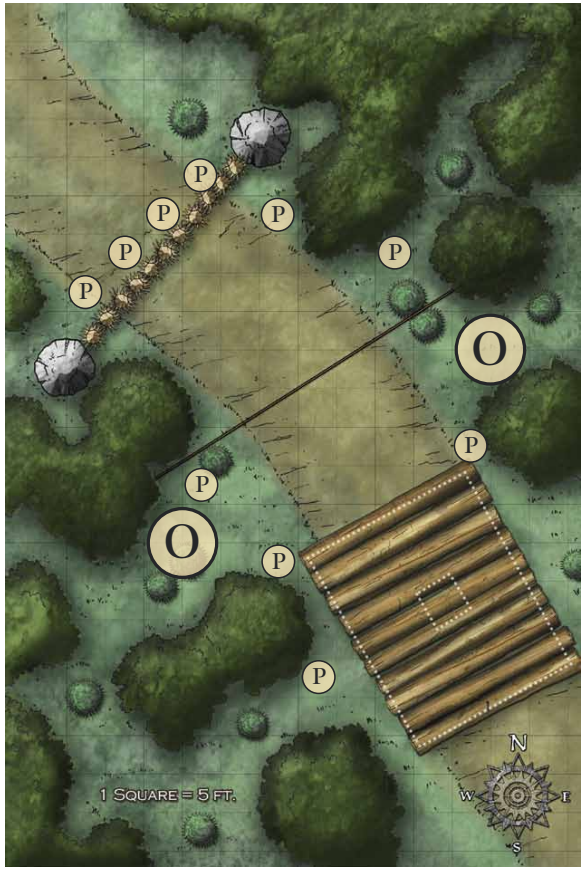
**Barricade:** Logs and sharpened stakes have been positioned across the road to provide superior cover and block cart or wagon traffic along the road. Each square climbed up or down this 10-foot-high barricade costs 4 squares of movement.

**Boulder:** Two boulders block the ends of the barricade. Climbing onto a boulder costs 2 squares of movement.

**Brush:** Forest scrub grows throughout the valley and counts as difficult terrain to Medium or smaller creatures. It presents no obstacle to Large creatures (such as the outriders' horses).

**Roadway:** This thoroughfare is bumpy and rough but otherwise clear.

**Trees:** Fir trees grow thickly and their branches hang close to the ground. Squares in tree spaces provide light concealment and are difficult terrain.



# 2—March of the Snaketongue

**Encounter Level 8 (1,750 XP)**

## Setup

**1 snaketongue beastlord** (B)
**1 snaketongue warrior** (W)
**6 snaketongue initiates** (N)
**1 giant riding lizard** (W)
**2 giant draft lizards** (L)

A convoy of snaketongue cultists makes its way toward the rocky promontory, but their giant draft lizards are laden with abducted human villagers. If the characters have tracked these snaketongue cultists, they can try to surprise the convoy.

If the characters were not following tracks but merely seeking out the unusual rocky promontory, they still encounter the snaketongue cultists but are as likely to be surprised by the convoy as they are to do any surprising.

## Tactics

The snaketongue cultists make little effort to hide their presence. They form a single column with 5 feet between creatures. Each draft lizard carries two unconscious villagers. Ranged attacks that miss draft lizards by 5 or less strike and kill a villager instead. The characters should be made aware of this possibility before shooting or throwing at the animals.

When the attack begins, the snaketongue warrior sets up a keening wail to alert the snaketongue army. Mounted snaketongue warriors and archery brigades set out from the citadel when this signal is heard.

The snaketongue beastlord charges the party defender with both giant draft lizards at his side and attacks with a poisoned khopesh. The mounted snaketongue warrior charges the party leader or skirmisher, while the snaketongue initiates fan out to attack the party controller.

The snaketongue cultists fight to the death, eager to die in service to their god Zehir. The giant draft lizards will continue fighting even after the snaketongue beastlord has fallen, believing they are protecting his corpse. Cutting the rope bonds that hold the villagers (AC 10, HP 5) would be prudent before killing the giant draft lizards (whose dead bulk might crush their bodies).

If the characters are faring poorly, Kylar can emerge from the forest and join them or insist that they retreat with her to safety (see Kylar Felstorm, page 29). She only uses her basic melee attack and bonded weapon powers.

## Developments

As the villagers are being freed, a mounted snaketongue warrior arrives on the scene. Read the following:

*A mounted snaketongue warrior emerges from the marsh reeds about 50 yards away. He draws a bow and launches a single arrow high into the sky. A sunrod lashed to its head makes it easy to follow as it arcs down toward you. Moments later, a cone of missiles fills the sky, all converging on your position.*

**Eclipse of Arrows** (standard; at-will)
Area burst 2 within 40; +11 vs. Reflex; 20 damage. *Miss:* Half damage. *Special:* Light shield grants resist 5; heavy shield grants resist 10.

The characters should realize that the villagers cannot survive these arrows. Each hero can cover one adjacent villager as a free action by using their body as a shield, but they take 5 extra points of damage for doing so.

If she hasn't appeared already, Kylar arrives after the first Eclipse of Arrows attack and offers to guide the heroes to safety.

If the characters try to counteract the archers, they simply melt away into the marsh to pick up firing again from new positions. The archers aren't concentrated in one place but are dispersed all around the characters, who are unlikely to catch more than one or two cultists. In the meantime, the heroes and the villagers are subjected to Eclipse of Arrows attacks until they retreat.

| **Snaketongue Beastlord (B)** | **Level 8 Soldier** |
|---|---|
| **Medium natural humanoid, human** | **XP 350** |
| **Initiative** +10 | **Senses** Perception +6; low-light vision |
| **HP** 88; **Bloodied** 44 | |
| **AC** 24; **Fortitude** 21, **Reflex** 21, **Will** 18 | |
| **Resist** 10 poison | |
| **Speed** 7 | |
| ǂ **Khopesh** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Poison, Weapon** | |
| +15 vs. AC; 1d8 + 5 damage, and the snaketongue beastlord makes a secondary attack against the same target. *Secondary Attack:* +13 vs. Fortitude; ongoing 5 poison damage (save ends). | |
| **Kindred Ferocity** (free, when the beastlord makes a melee attack, 1/turn; at-will) | |
| One giant lizard adjacent to that target can make a melee basic attack against the same target. | |
| **Alignment** Chaotic Evil | **Languages** Common, Draconic |
| **Skills** Nature +11, Religion +10 | |
| **Str** 20 (+9) | **Dex** 18 (+8) **Wis** 14 (+6) |
| **Con** 16 (+7) | **Int** 12 (+5) **Cha** 12 (+5) |
| **Equipment** hide armor, poisoned khopesh, sunrod | |

| Snaketongue Warrior (W) | Level 8 Brute |
|---|---|
| Medium natural humanoid, human | XP 350 |

**Initiative** +6 **Senses** Perception +5
**HP** 106; **Bloodied** 53
**AC** 20; **Fortitude** 18, **Reflex** 17, **Will** 17
**Resist** 10 poison
**Speed** 6

**Greatsword** (standard, at-will) ✦ **Poison, Weapon**
+13 vs. AC; 1d10 + 3 damage (1d10 + 5 damage while bloodied) and the snaketongue warrior makes a secondary attack.
*Secondary Attack:* +11 vs. Fortitude; ongoing 5 poison damage (save ends).

**Alignment** Evil **Languages** Common, Draconic
**Skills** Religion +10

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Str** 16 (+7) | **Dex** 14 (+6) | **Wis** 12 (+5) |
| **Con** 16 (+7) | **Int** 12 (+5) | **Cha** 14 (+6) |

**Equipment** poisoned greatsword, leather armor

| 6 Snaketongue Initiates (N) | Level 7 Minion |
|---|---|
| Medium natural humanoid | XP 75 each |

**Initiative** +5 **Senses** Perception +4
**HP** 1; a missed attack never damages a minion
**AC** 20; **Fortitude** 18, **Reflex** 17, **Will** 17
**Speed** 6

**Greatsword** (standard, at-will) ✦ **Poison, Weapon**
+11 vs. AC; 5 damage, and the snaketongue initiate makes a secondary attack.
*Secondary Attack:* +9 vs. Fortitude; ongoing 2 poison damage (save ends).

**Alignment** Chaotic evil **Languages** Common, Draconic

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Str** 16 (+6) | **Dex** 14 (+5) | **Wis** 12 (+4) |
| **Con** 13 (+4) | **Int** 12 (+4) | **Cha** 14 (+5) |

**Equipment** poisoned greatsword, leather armor

| 2 Giant Draft Lizards (L) | Level 4 Brute |
|---|---|
| Large natural beast | XP 175 each |

**Initiative** +4 **Senses** Perception +1
**HP** 69; **Bloodied** 34
**AC** 16; **Fortitude** 18, **Reflex** 16, **Will** 13
**Speed** 7 (swamp walk), climb 2

**Bite** (standard, at-will)
+7 vs. AC; 2d6 + 4 damage

**Alignment** Unaligned **Languages** -

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Str** 19 (+6) | **Dex** 14 (+4) | **Wis** 9 (+1) |
| **Con** 19 (+6) | **Int** 2 (-2) | **Cha** 7 (0) |

| Giant Riding Lizard (W) | Level 6 Brute |
|---|---|
| Large natural beast (mount) | XP 250 |

**Initiative** +6 **Senses** Perception +2
**HP** 90; **Bloodied** 45
**AC** 18; **Fortitude** 20, **Reflex** 18, **Will** 14
**Speed** 9 (swamp walk), climb 4

**Bite** (standard, at-will)
+9 vs. AC; 2d8 + 5 damage.

**Claw** (standard, at-will)
+10 vs. AC; 2d6 + 5 damage.

**Combined Attack** (while mounted by a friendly rider of 6th level or higher; encounter) ✦ **Mount**
When the giant lizard's rider makes a melee attack against a target, the lizard can make a *claw* attack against the same target.

**Alignment** Unaligned **Languages** -

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Str** 20 (+8) | Dex 17 (+6) | **Wis** 9 (+2) |
| **Con** 20 (+8) | **Int** 2 (-1) | **Cha** 7 (+1) |

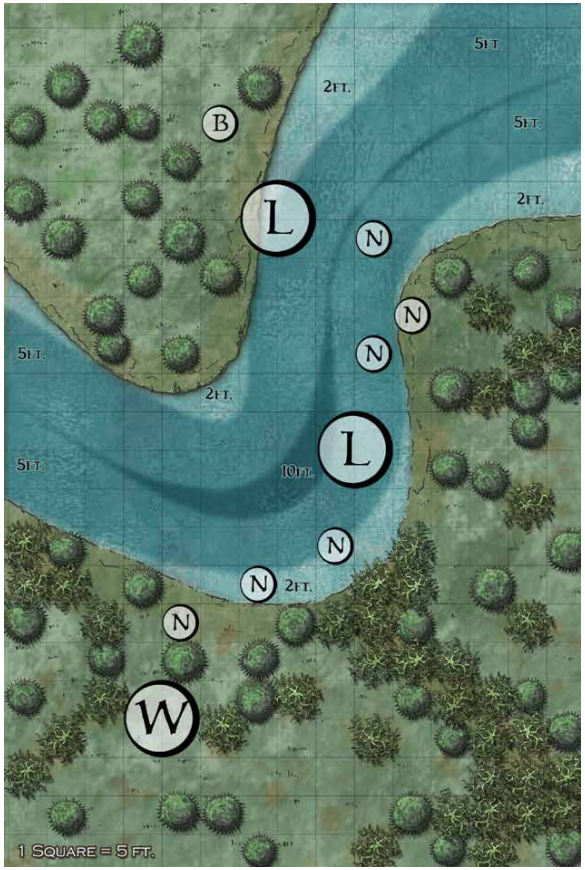
## Features of the Area

**Illumination:** Bright light, or dim light at night.

**Explosive Pollen Brambles:** The brambles of Nettleblight Swamp count as difficult terrain and provide concealment. The snaketongue cultists know how to avoid this hazard without slowing down.

**Marsh Foliage:** Tall grasses and reeds grow throughout the marshland. These areas count as difficult terrain but present no obstacle to giant lizards.

**Marsh River:** The river varies between 2 feet deep, 5 feet deep with a current, and 10 feet deep. Marsh water less than one-half character height counts as difficult terrain, but presents no obstacle to giant lizards. Marsh water more than one-half character height requires a DC 10 Athletics check to swim. The murky water provides concealment to partially submerged creatures and total concealment to completely submerged creatures.



## 3—Mounted Escort

**Encounter Level 6 (1,250 XP)**

### Setup

**5 human toughs (R)**

Five bandits ride into Elkridge searching for the characters and threatening villagers. Once the bandits confront the characters directly, they make the following statement:

*"You have been summoned by Skarn Felstorm to her fortress. Declining this invitation is not an option."*
*The ruffian leans forward and places a hand on his broadsword, "Speaking for myself, I hope you decline."*

### Tactics

The human toughs remain mounted during the encounter. They are aware that the characters might attack from range and so have surrounded themselves with villagers for cover (marked "P" on the map, for "Prisoner"). Any ranged attack that misses a bandit by 5 or less strikes and kills a villager. The characters should be made aware of this reality before firing.

If combat ensues, the horsemen do not fight with lethal intent. They offer bloodied characters a chance to surrender. If the majority of mounted horsemen are bloodied or one is about to die, they yield to the characters.

If this fight takes place instead on the way to the Stormbolt Highlands, then adjust the setup to fit the terrain and situation.

| **5 Human Toughs (R)** | **Level 6 Brute** |
|---|---|
| **Medium natural humanoid** | **XP 250 each** |
| **Initiative** +5 | **Senses Perception** +4 |
| **HP** 88; **Bloodied** 44 | |
| **AC** 17; **Fortitude** 19, **Reflex** 15, **Will** 15 | |
| **Speed** 5 | |
| ⓘ **Broadsword** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon** | |
| +9 vs. AC; 1d10 + 7 damage. | |
| ⓘ **War Pick** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon** | |
| +9 vs. AC; 1d8 + 5 damage. | |
| ⸸ **Skewered Swing** (free, when the human ruffian hits with the war pick; recharge ⚀⚁⚂) ✦ **Weapon** | |
| Requires broadsword; +11 vs. AC; 1d10 + 7 damage. | |
| ⓘ **Javelin** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon** | |
| Range 10/20; +7 vs. AC; 1d6 + 5 damage. | |
| **Alignment** Unaligned | **Languages** Common |
| **Skills** Athletics +12, Intimidate +10 | |
| **Str** 18 (+7) | **Dex** 14 (+5) **Wis** 12 (+4) |
| **Con** 18 (+7) | **Int** 8 (+2) **Cha** 14 (+5) |
| **Equipment** Chain armor, broadsword, war pick, 3 javelins | |

### Features of the Area

**Illumination:** Bright light during day or dim light at night.

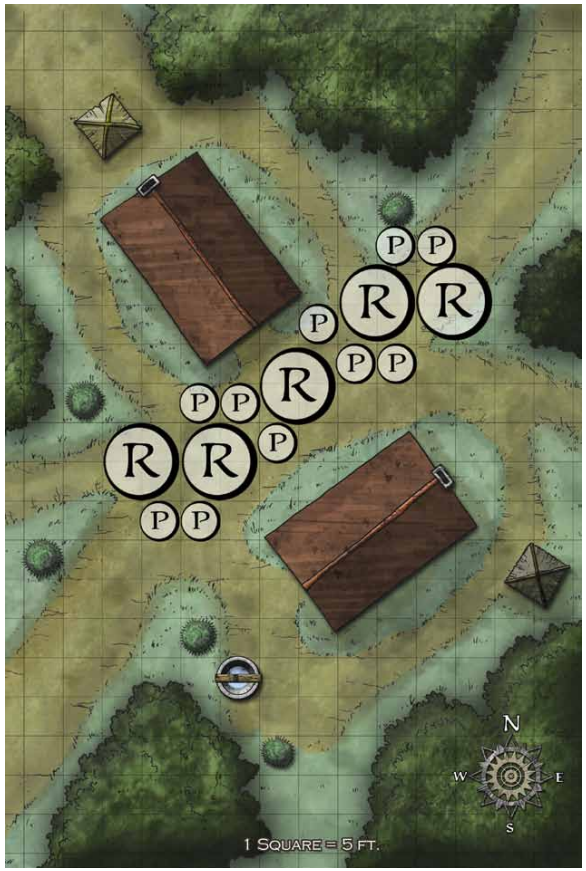
**Brush:** Forest scrub grows throughout the valley and counts as difficult terrain, but presents no obstacle to Large creatures (such as the human toughs' horses).

**Door:** Cottage doors are made from old timbered wood with a break DC of 16.

**Trees:** Trees provide light concealment to characters standing in a tree space, and tree spaces are difficult terrain.

**Walls:** Cottage walls are made of wood. They can be climbed with a DC 20 Athletics check or destroyed with a DC 25 Strength check.

**Window:** Perception checks made through a shuttered window take a –5 penalty. Windows can be opened as a minor action from inside. From outside, they can be forced open with a DC 16 Strength check. Open windows provide superior cover. It costs 2 squares of movement to climb through an open window.



# 4—Debt of Blood

**Encounter Level 7 (1,500 XP)**

## Setup

**5 human ambushers**

In the great hall of the Stormbolt Highlands, Skarn subjects the characters to gladiatorial combat to determine their martial worth. Only five human ambushers enter the arena, but Skarn Felstorm, 5 human toughs, 1 angry mob, 20 human lackeys, and 2 fey panthers all stand ready to fight if the battle leaves the arena.

## Tactics

The lead human ambusher opens by launching the spikes from his *manticore spiked shield* (*Adventurer's Vault* page 118) at as many characters as possible. They then use *dazing strike* to shift into the most advantagous positions.

If the characters attempt to leave the arena before the bout is properly over, they will be thrown back in by the angry mob and human prowlers.

Select one of the human ambushers as their leader. This man will fight to his last breath, unwilling to back down while Skarn is watching. Once he is killed or knocked unconscious, the remaining ambushers yield once bloodied. They will not surrender while their leader is still fighting.

**Revolving Training Post Hazard** — **Level 7 Obstacle** — **XP 300**

*A multitude of lethal weapons protrude from a revolving wooden pillar.*

**Hazard:** An 8-foot-high training post fitted with blades and flails which attack adjacent targets when spinning.

**Perception**

No check is necessary to notice the Revolving Training Post.
**Initiative:** +7

**Trigger**

The post attacks all adjacent characters on its turn. It makes an opportunity attack against a creature that enters an adjacent square.

**Attack**

Standard Action — Close burst 1
*Target:* Creatures in burst
*Attack:* +13 vs. AC
*Hit:* 1d8 + 4 damage
Opportunity Action — Melee 1
*Target:* The triggering creature
*Attack:* +13 vs. AC
*Hit:* 1d8 + 4 damage
*Special:* This device is manually operated by three or four characters at a turnstile. Damage is halved if there are only two or three operators, and the device does not function with fewer than two operators.

**Countermeasures**

- ✦ A character can remain outside the burst 1 radius to avoid the attack.
- ✦ A character can attack the Revolving Training Post and destroy the device (break with Strength, DC 25; AC 4, HP 40).
- ✦ Damage is decreased if the turnstile's operators are driven off or killed. The hazard ceases to function with fewer than two operators.

**5 Human Ambushers** — **Level 7 Skirmisher**
Medium natural humanoid, human — XP 300 each

**Initiative** +8 **Senses** Perception +3
**HP** 77; **Bloodied** 38
**AC** 21; **Fortitude** 19, **Reflex** 20, **Will** 19
**Speed** 6

**Mace** (standard, at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
+12 vs. AC; 1d8 + 4 damage, and the human ambusher shifts 1 square.

**Dagger** (standard, at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
Ranged 5/10; +14 vs. AC; 1d4 + 4 damage.

**Dazing Strike** (standard, encounter) ✦ **Weapon**
Requires mace; +12 vs. AC; 1d8 + 4 damage, the target is dazed until the end of the human ambusher's next turn, and the human ambusher shifts 1 square.

**Combat Advantage**
The human ambusher deals an extra 1d6 damage on melee and ranged attacks against any target it has combat advantage against.

**Alignment** Evil **Languages** Common
**Skills** Stealth +11, Streetwise +9, Thievery +11
**Str** 12 (+4) **Dex** 17 (+6) **Wis** 11 (+3)
**Con** 13 (+4) **Int** 10 (+3) **Cha** 12 (+4)
**Equipment** Hide armor, mace, dagger, spiked shield; lead human ambusher also wields a *manticore spiked shield*

**Skarn Felstorm, Human Blade of Kord** Level 8 Elite Soldier (Leader)
**Medium natural humanoid** XP 700

**Initiative** +10 **Senses** Perception +6
**Motivated Bravado aura 5;** allies in the aura gain a +2 bonus to damage rolls against opponents they have combat advantage against.
**HP** 180; **Bloodied** 90
**AC** 22; **Fortitude** 22, **Reflex** 20, **Will** 18
**Saving Throws** +2
**Speed** 6
**Action Points** 1

⊕ **Fullblade** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
+13 vs. AC; 1d12 + 8 damage, and the target is marked until the end of the blade of Kord's next turn.

**Throwing Spear** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
Range 10/20; +11 vs. AC; 1d8 + 8 damage.

**Circling Momentum** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
The human blade of Kord makes one *fullblade* attack, shifts up to 2 squares, and makes another *fullblade* attack.

**Overreaching Swing** (standard; recharge when first bloodied) ✦ **Weapon**
Requires fullblade; close burst 2; targets enemies; +13 vs. AC; 1d12 + 6 damage.

**Defensive Breach** (standard, recharge ⚄ ⁞⁞) ✦ **Weapon**
Requires throwing spear; range 10/20; +11 vs. Reflex; 2d8 + 8 damage, and any attack against the target scores a critical hit on a roll of 18-20 until end of encounter.

**Approval of Kord** (immediate reaction, when a human blade of Kord or any ally within range scores a critical hit; at-will) ✦ **Healing**
Range 5; the triggering creature regains 10 hit points.

**Alignment** Good **Languages** Common
**Skills** Athletics +15, Diplomacy +13, Endurance +13, Religion +12
**Str** 22 (+10) **Dex** 18 (+8) **Wis** 14 (+6)
**Con** 18 (+8) **Int** 16 (+7) **Cha** 18 (+8)
**Equipment** scale armor, fullblade, 5 throwing spears

**Angry Mob** Level 5 Brute
Gargantuan natural humanoid (swarm) XP 200

**Initiative** +3 **Senses** Perception +1
**Swarm Attack** aura 1; the angry mob makes a basic attack as a free action against each enemy that begins its turn within the aura.
**HP** 74; **Bloodied** 37
**AC** 17; **Fortitude** 19, **Reflex** 17, **Will** 16
**Resist** half damage from melee and ranged attacks; **Vulnerable** 10 against close and area attacks
**Speed** 5

⊕ **Savage Mob** (standard, at-will)
+8 vs. AC; 2d6 + 4 damage, and the target is knocked prone.

**Crushing Press**
An angry mob deals an extra 2d6 damage to prone creatures.

**Alignment** Unaligned **Languages** -
**Str** 18 (+6) **Dex** 15 (+4) **Wis** 8 (+1)
**Con** 14 (+4) **Int** 8 (+1) **Cha** 12 (+3)

**Human Lackey** Level 7 Minion
Medium natural humanoid, human XP 75

**Initiative** +3 **Senses** Perception +4
**HP** 1; a missed attack never damages a minion.
**AC** 19; **Fortitude** 17, **Reflex** 14, **Will** 15
**Speed** 6

⊕ **Club** (standard, at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
+12 vs. AC; 6 damage.

**Mob Rule**
A human lackey gains a +2 power bonus to all defenses while at least two other human lackeys are within 5 squares of it.

**Alignment** Any **Languages** Common
**Str** 16 (+6) **Dex** 11 (+3) **Wis** 12 (+4)
**Con** 14 (+5) **Int** 10 (+3) **Cha** 13 (+4)
**Equipment** club , leather armor

**Fey Panther** Level 4 Skirmisher
Medium fey beast XP 175

**Initiative** +8 **Senses** Perception +8; low-light vision
**HP** 54; **Bloodied** 27
**AC** 18; **Fortitude** 16, **Reflex** 18, **Will** 15
**Speed** 8, climb 6

⊕ **Bite** (standard, at-will)
+9 vs. AC; 1d6 + 4 damage, and the fey panther shifts 1 square.

**Charging Pounce**
When the fey panther charges, it deals an extra 1d6 damage and knocks the target prone.

**Fey Step** (move; encounter) ✦ **Teleportation**
The fey panther can teleport 5 squares.

**Alignment** Unaligned **Languages** -
**Skills** Stealth +11
**Str** 14 (+4) **Dex** 18 (+6) **Wis** 13 (+3)
**Con** 14 (+4) **Int** 2 (-2) **Cha** 11 (+2)

## Features of the Area

**Illumination:** Bright, from torches, lanterns, and candles all around the hall and arena.

**Bench:** A 50-pound bench can be thrown as an improvised weapon, deals 1d10 damage, and has a range equal to the Strength modifier of the thrower. The bench can target two adjacent squares. A target that is hit can be pushed 1 square.

**Chandelier:** Nine wrought-iron chandeliers hang on chains from the ceiling. A character can swing from any chandelier with a DC 10 Acrobatics check, if he can reach it. The chandeliers are 10 feet above the tables, which places them about 13 feet above the floor (23 feet above the arena floor).

**Door:** Doors are made from wood and can be destroyed with a DC 16 Strength check (AC 5, HP 20).

**Arena Door:** This wooden door is barred on the outside of the arena. It can be destroyed with a DC 20 Strength check (AC 5, HP 30).

**Great Hall Door:** This large wooden door can be barred from the inside (requiring a DC 10 Strength check to lif the bar) and destroyed with a DC 25 Strength check (AC 4, HP 40).

**Harvest Table:** The tops of the tables are difficult terrain, because of all the dishes and food on them. A table can be tipped over to form superior cover with a DC 15 Strength check.

**Revolving Training Post:** The revolving wooden training posts are 8 feet high and are fitted with blades and flails. Squares adjacent to posts are difficult terrain. A post can be climbed with a DC 15 Athletics check. Balancing atop a revolving post requires a DC 25 Acrobatics check at the start of a character's turn.

**Square Arena:** The arena is sunk 10 feet into the ground. A DC 10 Athletics check is needed to climb out rather than leaving by the stairs.

**Turnstile:** Each revolving training post is operated by a corresponding turnstile, which is turned by 1 to 4 bandits.

# 5—When Armies Collide

**Encounter Level 8 (1,750 XP)**

## Setup

During the march toward Nettleblight Swamp, Skarn explains that she will use her bandit army to harry the snaketongue cultists, allowing the heroes to infiltrate the temple. She also authorizes the characters to command her bandits as they see fit to help them win the day.

**When Armies Collide**

**Level:** 8 (XP 1,750)

**Complexity:** 5 (requires 12 successes before 3 failures)

**Special:** If the characters summoned a storm at the Cradle of Kord, they begin with one automatic success. Once a character has achieved a success with a particular primary skill, the DC for subsequent checks by the same character using the same skill increases by 5. Athletics, Bluff, Diplomacy, Endurance, Intimidation, and Stealth can't be used until they are made available by History, Insight, and Perception (secondary skills); be sure to read the entire skill challenge before beginning.

**Primary Skills:** Athletics, Bluff, Diplomacy, Endurance, Intimidate, Stealth. Also see the "Melee Challenge" sidebar.

*Athletics, Endurance (DC 17):* The character stands with the bandit army to keep their offensive line from losing ground. Each character can attempt only one Athletics check and one Endurance check in this skill challenge.

*Bluff (DC 17):* The character commands a brigade of bandits to surge forward and feint back, drawing the snaketongue cultists into an encircling trap.

*Diplomacy (DC 17):* The character invigorates the bandit army with a battle song, combat humor, or rousing words of bravado. The first success opens up the use of Intimidation.

*Intimidate (DC 17):* The character rouses a brigade of bandits to rattle the enemy by charging recklessly toward their defenses. Each character can attempt only one Intimidate check in this skill challenge.

*Stealth (DC 17):* The character leads a brigade of bandits to skirmish against the snaketongue cultists on the edges of the battlefield.

**Secondary Skills:** Heal, History, Insight, Perception.

*Heal (DC 17):* You bandage the wounded and prioritize those who can be saved from those who cannot. This skill can't be used until after at least one skill check has failed. Use of this skill can generate a maximum of 1 success.

*History (DC 22):* The character suggests a risky flanking maneuver that was effectively employed during a great historical battle. First success opens up the use of Stealth. Success with this skill produces 2 successes in the challenge, but it can be attempted only once.

*Insight, Perception (DC 12):* The character discerns where the snaketongue cultists are poorly arrayed and directs the bandit army to attack those areas. Using these skills provides a +2 bonus to all further skill checks until someone fails a check. First success with Insight opens up the use of Bluff and Diplomacy, and first success with Perception opens up the use of Athletics and Endurance.

### Melee Challenge

Before making a primary skill check during the "When Armies Collide" skill challenge, the character can choose to fight one, two, or three snaketongue initiates (page 19) . The character earns a +2 bonus on the next skill check if one snaketongue initiate is killed, +3 if two are killed, and +5 if three are killed. Alternatively, one skill failure can be canceled.

This fight lasts one round. Each character can spend 1 action point during the course of the skill challenge, as with a normal encounter.

Determine randomly which adjacent square each snaketongue initiate occupies around the character. Roll one initiative for all of the snaketongue initiates. They attack normally but don't move or shift.

No XP is awarded for killing these snaketongue initiates. Powers that last for the duration of an encounter end when the skill challenge ends

**Success:** The bandit army breaks the snaketongue cultists' line. The characters gain access to the temple as the battle rages outside. For each failure accrued during the challenge, each character loses one healing surge. Successful completion of this skill challenge counts as two encounters for the day—an automatic milestone and 1 action point. Characters can take a short rest in the mouth of the cave.

**Failure:** The bandit army suffers heavy casualties and creates only a narrow break through the snaketongue cultists' line. The adventurers battle their way into the occultist temple but each character loses four healing surges. No short rest is allowed.

# 6—Fangs of the Snake

**Encounter Level 9 (2,000 XP)**

## Setup

**1 snaketongue celebrant** (C)
**2 snaketongue assassins** (A)
**8 snaketongue initiates** (N)

The heroes make their way into the snaketongue cultist temple. After the Water Spewing Statue is activated, snaketongue initiates appear on catwalks with longbows, two snaketongue assassins engage the characters on the ground, and one snaketongue celebrant attacks from inside and atop the statue.

## Tactics

Kylar calls out from inside the yuan-ti anathema statue. The snaketongue celebrant hides in the statue as well, directly beneath the trapdoor of the statue head. The snaketongue celebrant can observe the entire cavern from his perch, but can be detected with a DC 30 Perception check. The snaketongue assassins are well hidden and suspended under the catwalk pillars, but can be detected with DC 25 Perception checks.

The snaketongue initiates hide in barracks carved out of the rock, ready to either appear when called or attack the first creature who enters. There is one initiate on each of the bottom catwalks, two on the middle catwalks, and one on the top catwalks. When the command is given, they attack with longbows. The initiates focus their attacks against characters who climb the statue. A character with a passive Insight score of 13 or higher senses that the initiates are trying to protect the statue.

If the characters help Kylar escape, thereby activating the flooding of the room, the snaketongue celebrant remains inside and casts *coils of despair* and *serpent's lash* from the safety of superior cover. He breaks cover only when his abilities do not recharge, the characters move beyond his range, or they ascend the statue. At that point, the snaketongue celebrant will either transform into a crushgrip constrictor or draw his scimitar and close in to melee range.

If the characters do not take Kylar's bait but investigate the catwalks or statue first, the snaketongue celebrant activates the flooding process from the control panel inside the statue's head. Snaketongue assassins and initiates attack immediately afterward.

Once the snaketongue assassins attack successfully with their poison daggers, they polymorph into crushgrip constrictors and fight in the water, where their Swim speed gives them an advantage. If the cavern fills with water, the snaketongue celebrant, assassins, and Kylar swim out through the floodgate, wait five minutes for the characters to drown, and then return to drain the room. Surviving snaketongue initiates retreat into any barrack, where pockets of air remain near the ceilings. Characters can benefit from these, too. Offer hints to the players, such as "initiates are fleeing into the flooding rooms," if they don't pick up the idea immediately on their own.

**Snaketongue Celebrant (C)** Level 11 Controller
Medium natural humanoid, human (shapechanger) XP 600
**Initiative** +9 **Senses** Perception +14
**HP** 117; **Bloodied** 58
**AC** 24; **Fortitude** 22, **Reflex** 20, **Will** 24
**Resist** 10 poison
**Speed** 7

**Scimitar** (standard, at-will) ✦ **Poison, Weapon**
+14 vs. AC; 1d8 + 3 damage (crit 2d8 + 11), and the snaketongue celebrant makes a secondary attack.
*Secondary Attack:* +12 vs. Fortitude; ongoing 5 poison damage (save ends).

**Serpent's Lash** (standard, recharge ⚅ ⚄ ⚃) ✦ **Psychic**
Ranged 5; a whip of amber-colored energy lashes the target; +14 vs. Will; 1d8 + 5 psychic damage, and the target grants combat advantage to all of its enemies until the end of the snaketongue celebrant's next turn.

**Coils of Despair** (standard, recharge ⚄ ⚃)
Area burst 5 within 10; targets enemies; +14 vs. Reflex; the target is restrained (save ends) by writhing coils of green energy.

**Serpent Form** (move; at-will) ✦ **Polymorph**
The snaketongue celebrant transforms into a crushgrip constrictor. Any equipment the celebrant is carrying merges with the new form. The celebrant uses the crushgrip constrictor's statistics instead of its own, except for hit points. Reverting to its true form is a minor action.

**Alignment** Evil **Languages** Common, Draconic
**Skills** Diplomacy +15, Insight +14, Intimidate +15, Religion +13
**Str** 17 (+8) **Dex** 19 (+9) **Wis** 19 (+9)
**Con** 21 (+10) **Int** 16 (+8) **Cha** 21 (+10)
**Equipment** hooded robe, poisoned scimitar

**2 Snaketongue Assassins (A)** Level 9 Lurker
Medium natural humanoid, human (shapechanger) XP 400 each

**Initiative** +13 **Senses** Perception +8
**HP** 80; **Bloodied** 40
**AC** 23; **Fortitude** 21, **Reflex** 21, **Will** 20
**Resist** 10 poison
**Speed** 7

⊕ **Dagger** (standard, at-will) ✦ **Poison, Weapon**
+14 vs. AC; 1d4 + 3 damage, and ongoing 10 poison damage (save ends).

**Crowd Shield**
The snaketongue assassin gains a +2 bonus to its AC and Reflex defense if it has one creature adjacent to it, or a +4 bonus if two or more creatures are adjacent to it.

**Serpent Form** (move; at-will) ✦ **Polymorph**
The snaketongue assassin transforms into a crushgrip constrictor. Any equipment the assassin is carrying merges with the new form. The assassin uses the crushgrip constrictor's statistics instead its own, except for hit points. Reverting to its true form is a minor action.

**Alignment** Evil **Languages** Common, Draconic
**Skills** Religion +11, Stealth +14
**Str** 16 (+7) **Dex** 20 (+9) **Wis** 18 (+8)
**Con** 20 (+9) **Int** 14 (+6) **Cha** 14 (+6)
**Equipment** poisoned dagger, leather armor

**8 Snaketongue Initiates (N)** Level 7 Minion
Medium natural humanoid XP 75 each

**Initiative** +5 **Senses** Perception +4
**HP** 1; a missed attack never damages a minion.
**AC** 20; **Fortitude** 18, **Reflex** 17, **Will** 17
**Speed** 6

⊕ **Greatsword** (standard, at-will) ✦ **Poison, Weapon**
+11 vs. AC; 5 damage, and the snaketongue initiate makes a secondary attack.
*Secondary Attack:* +9 vs. Fortitude; ongoing 2 poison damage (save ends).

⊕ **Longbow** (standard, at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
Ranged 20/40; +10 vs. AC; 5 damage.

**Alignment** Chaotic evil **Languages** Common, Draconic
**Str** 16 (+6) **Dex** 14 (+5) **Wis** 12 (+4)
**Con** 13 (+4) **Int** 12 (+4) **Cha** 14 (+5)
**Equipment** poisoned greatsword, longbow, 20 arrows, leather armor

**Crushgrip Constrictor** **Level 9 Soldier**
Large natural beast (reptile) XP –

**Initiative** +9 **Senses** Perception +12; low-light vision
**HP** 96; **Bloodied** 48
**AC** 25; **Fortitude** 25, **Reflex** 22, **Will** 22
**Speed** 6, climb 6, swim 6

⊕ **Bite** (standard, at-will)
+15 vs. AC; 1d10 + 6 damage, and the target is grabbed (until escape).

**Constrict** (standard, at-will)
Affects a target the crushgrip constrictor has grabbed; +13 vs. Fortitude; 2d6 + 12 damage, and the target is dazed until the end of the crushgrip constrictor's next turn.

**Alignment** Unaligned **Languages** -
**Skills** Stealth +12
**Str** 22 (+10) **Dex** 16 (+7) **Wis** 17 (+7)
**Con** 16 (+7) **Int** 2 (0) **Cha** 10 (+4)

## Features of the Area

**Illumination:** Dim, from oil-burning lanterns. Complete darkness once the room fills with water and the lanterns are extinguished.

**Anathema Statue:** The statue of the yuan-ti anathema is three storeys tall and carved directly from the surrounding rock. Its hundreds of snake heads are spouts that spray water from the marsh above into this chamber.

Once the flow of water begins, all squares within 3 of the statue (outlined on the map) become challenging terrain. Entering a challenging square costs double. A character that enters or begins its turn in a challenging square must make an Athletics check (DC 22) or be pushed 3 squares away from the statue and knocked prone. (Characters that are swimming in water over their heads are not literally 'knocked prone'. They spin and tumble out of control in the water and take all the same penalties as prone characters until they spend a move action 'standing up'—i.e., righting and reorienting themselves.)

This push effect is unavoidable anywhere within 3 squares of the statue, with one exception; characters above the statue are not affected. One way to get above the statue is to climb up to the highest catwalk and jump onto the statue's outstretched arms (Acrobatics, DC 15). Players may think of other plans.

The statue's arms, and hence the highest of the water spouts, are 35 feet above the floor. Once the water in the chamber is 35 or more feet deep (at the end of 25 rounds), characters can simply swim above the current. They will still be affected by the challenging terrain if they dive below the 35-foot mark within 3 squares of the statue.

A character atop the statue can disable the water spray by gaining access to the control panel inside the statue's head and completing the "Close the Valve" skill challenge.

**Archery Butt:** The archery targets are designed to swing like pendulums to act as moving targets. They provide cover when swinging and superior cover when motionless. A character can climb an archery target with a DC 15 Athletics check and can balance atop one with a DC 25 Acrobatics check at the start of his turn. The targets are only 6 feet tall.

**Barracks:** Every catwalk level grants access to 10 barrack rooms, each of which is large enough to accommodate four Medium creatures in two wooden bunks.

**Catwalk:** Three levels of wooden balconies or catwalks have been constructed against the cavern wall. The top catwalk is 5 feet wide, the middle catwalk is 10 feet wide, and the bottom catwalk is 15 feet wide; their inner edges (the edges toward the center of the room) align vertically, as shown in the side view of the chamber. The catwalks are 10, 20, and 30 feet above the floor, respectively. Each catwalk is supported

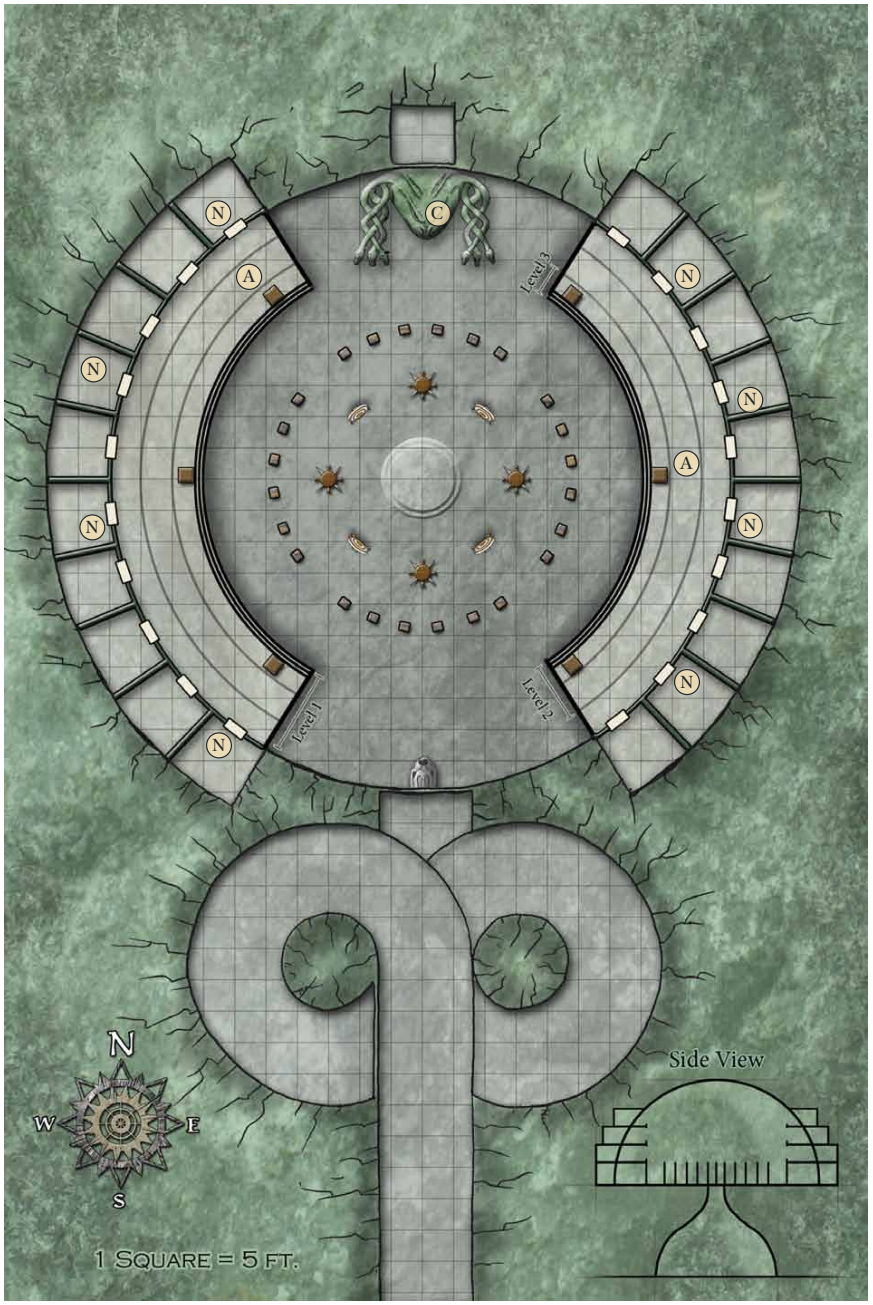
by wooden posts which can be destroyed with a DC 16 Strength check (AC 5, HP 15). If two posts are destroyed at one end of a catwalk, the last 10 feet of each overhead level crashes down. Characters or creatures on those catwalks take normal falling damage. Characters beneath them take 1d10 damage for each level that collapses onto them. Characters trained in Acrobatics can roll to reduce that damage, regardless of whether it's from falling or having levels fall on them.

**Ladder:** A wooden ladder extends to each catwalk level through a square opening. Climbing a ladder is done at half speed, the same as any other climbing. In addition, the holes that the ladders pass through are small enough that a Medium or larger creature must squeeze to get through.

**Pillars:** A ring of 10-foot wooden pillars encircles the arena. A DC 15 Athletics is needed to climb a pillar. A DC 20 Acrobatics check is needed to balance atop a pillar, made at the start of the character's turn.

**Training Post:** The four training posts are constructed with moving parts that swivel when struck. These provide cover to characters behind them. A DC 15 Athletics is needed to climb a training post. A DC 20 Acrobatics check is needed to balance atop a post, made at the start of the character's turn.

**Water:** Marsh water up to half a character's height counts as difficult terrain for that character. Water up to the character's height causes the character to be slowed. Once the depth is greater than a character's height, that character must swim (*Player's Handbook* page 183) with a DC 15 Athletics check. The murky water provides concealment to partially submerged creatures and total concealment to completely submerged creatures.



## 7—Close the Valve

**Encounter Level 8 (350 XP)**

### Setup

While the characters fight the snaketongue cultists, a DC 17 Intelligence check determines that the cavern will fill up with marsh water in 3 minutes. The highest point of the domed cavern is 50 feet above the floor.

After climbing atop the statue and descending through the trapdoor into the statue's head, characters can operate the control panel to shut off the flow of water. Completing this skill challenge opens a drain in the floor that threatens to suck characters through it. Kylar wants to be washed into the lower chamber before anyone else; be sure that she is near the center of the temple during this skill challenge.

**Close the Valve**

**Level:** 8 (XP 350)

**Complexity:** 1 (requires 4 succeses before 3 failures)

**Primary Skills:** Dungeoneering, Perception, Thievery. Characters must succeed at a Perception check before attempting Thievery, and must succeed at Thievery before attempting Dungeoneering.

*Dungeoneering (DC 12):* The character recognizes the mechanism and can circumvent crucial functions built into the statue. This skill can generate a maximum of 2 successes.

*Thievery (DC 17):* The character identifies a spatial pattern that must be maintained when adjusting the levers of the control panel. First success opens up the use of Dungeoneering. This skill can generate any number of successes.

*Perception (DC 12):* The character can distinguish which levers have been used more often by the cultists. This does not count as a success or failure in this skill challenge but provides a +2 bonus to all further skill rolls until someone fails a check. First success opens up the use of Thievery.

**Success:** The characters figure out how and in what order to manipulate the snake-headed levers to stop the flow of water and open a hole in the floor that drains the domed cavern. This generates a current that might pull the characters through the opening and into the lower chamber.

**Failure:** The characters cannot figure out how the control panel works. They need to find pockets of air in the barracks, swim up through the sluiceway from the statue's base to the swamp 100 feet above, or find some other way to survive until the cultists open the drain 5 minutes later.

## 8—Belly of the Snake

**Encounter Level 9 (2,000 XP)**

### Setup

**Kylar Felstorm** (K)
**1 yuan-ti occultist** (O)
**4 snaketongue initiates** (N)

The adventurers discover a chamber below the temple either when the floor drain opens and flushes the characters there or when the snake-head control panel is properly operated, revealing a set of stairs leading down. The steps wind down to an antechamber containing four statues, which connects to the area where the captive villagers are held and ultimately to the yuan-ti occultist's sanctum.

### Tactics

If the giant snake skull above the cavern entranceway perceived the characters inside the temple (Perception +13), the *skull watch* ritual (*Open Grave* page 50) alerts Sacharlim to their presence. Unless interrupted by the characters, the yuan-ti occultist immediately begins casting the *water breathing* ritual over the next 10 minutes. Completing this ritual allows Sacharlim to escape through the underground river if he needs a way out.

The moment the floor drain opened in the temple, Sacharlim hid behind the illusory wall looking into the antechamber containing the yuan-ti statues. A DC 26 Perception check can detect his presence, but Sacharlim is treated as invisible until the illusion is discovered.

Sacharlim remains concealed until most of the characters enter the antechamber or the illusion is in danger of being discovered. The yuan-ti occultist then turns invisible, sneaks into the corridor, and casts *mental constriction* on the party at the earliest opportunity. After that, he spends his action point to attack the party defender or nearest viable target with *dual fang strike*.

Assuming the illusion hasn't been discovered, Perception checks suffer the –10 penalty to detect his emergence from behind the illusory cavern.

Kylar waits under the milky water of the subterranean river. She emerges and climbs up the steps into the antechamber after Sacharlim attacks. Her intent is to attack twice with her dagger and activate *drowning blade* on a hit. When threatened, Kylar retreats across the water and casts *choking water shards*.

Kylar will berate the characters when bloodied, attack, and then sink underwater as a free action, where she makes a Stealth check to hide and wait for Sacharlim.

*"This trap was for my sister! Zehir promised to remake her as he did me! Skarn and I will not be separated! If my father couldn't keep us apart, then neither can you!"*

Sacharlim retreats back to his sanctum when bloodied, but not before releasing his snaketongue initiates from a dungeon cell (your choice of which one) to harry the characters. The yuan-ti occultist stashes his ritual book in a locked, watertight chest on which he has cast Leomund's Secret Chest and dismisses it back to the bottom of the pool in the vaulted chamber. He then dons a *hat of disguise* (*Adventurer's Vault* page 142) with the intention of mingling among the freed captives and being escorted out of the complex by the very characters who came to kill him. The hat adds +5 to his Bluff check, giving him a +20 bonus to blend in with other villagers. He will slip away in the swamp during the return trek to Elkridge.

If his ruse is unsuccessful, Sacharlim turns invisible and tries to sneak out to the water-filled vault. There he will meet up with Kylar, and the two will swim through the underground river (if he completed the Water Breathing ritual). If he did not complete the ritual, Sacharlim turns invisible and either sneaks up the steps to the temple and out of the complex ahead of the characters, or finds somewhere to hide until the heroes and villagers have left, when he can complete the ritual at his leisure and swim away. Kylar might swim out through the river or use *change shape* to join Sacharlim in the throng of freed villagers.

**Sacharlim, Yuan-Ti Occultist** **Level 11 Elite Lurker**
**Medium natural humanoid (reptile)** **XP 1,200**

**Initiative** +15 **Senses** Perception +8
**HP** 184; **Bloodied** 92
**AC** 25; **Fortitude** 23, **Reflex** 24, **Will** 22
**Resist** 10 poison
**Saving Throws** +2
**Speed** 7, climb 7
**Action Points** 1

**Kukri** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Poison**
+16 vs. AC; 2d6 + 6 damage. If the target cannot see the yuan-ti, it also takes ongoing 15 poison damage (save ends).

**Dual Fang Strike** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
The yuan-ti occultist makes two basic melee attacks.

**Zehir's Shroud** (standard; at-will)
The yuan-ti occultist becomes invisible until the end of its next turn.

**Mental Constriction** (standard; recharge ⚅) ✦ **Psychic**
Close blast 5; targets enemies; +14 vs. Will; 2d6 + 5 damage, and the target is dazed (save ends). If the target cannot see the yuan-ti occultist, the target also takes a -2 penalty to attack rolls against the occultist while the target is dazed.

**Alignment** Chaotic Evil **Languages** Common, Draconic
**Skills** Arcana +14, Bluff +15, Religion +14, Stealth +16
**Str** 18 (+9) **Dex** 22 (+11) **Wis** 16 (+8)
**Con** 20 (+10) **Int** 18 (+9) **Cha** 20 (+10)
**Equipment** kukri, ritual book, *hat of disguise*

**4 Snaketongue Initiates (N)** Level 7 Minion
Medium natural humanoid XP 75 each

**Initiative** + 5 **Senses** Perception + 4
**HP** 1; a missed attack never damages a minion.
**AC** 20; **Fortitude** 18, **Reflex** 17, **Will** 17
**Speed** 6

**Greatsword** (standard, at-will) ✦ **Poison, Weapon**
+ 11 vs. AC; 5 damage, and the snaketongue initiate makes a secondary attack.
*Secondary Attack:* + 9 vs. Fortitude; ongoing 2 poison damage (save ends).

**Alignment** Chaotic evil **Languages** Common, Draconic
**Str** 16 ( + 6) **Dex** 14 ( + 5) **Wis** 12 ( + 4)
**Con** 13 ( + 4) **Int** 12 ( + 4) **Cha** 14 ( + 5)
**Equipment** poisoned greatsword, leather armor

**Kylar Felstorm, River Hag** **Level 6 Elite Artillery**
**Medium fey humanoid (aquatic)** **XP 500**

**River Leech** aura 2; an enemy that starts its turn in the aura takes 5 damage and the river hag gains 5 temporary hit points
**Initiative** +8 **Senses** Perception +9, low-light vision
**HP** 116; **Bloodied** 58
**AC** 20; **Fortitude** 18, **Reflex** 20, **Will** 16
**Saving Throws** +2
**Speed** 7, swim 7
**Action Point** 1

**Dagger** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
+11 vs. AC; 1d4 + 5 damage.

**Thrown Dagger** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
Ranged 5/10; +13 vs. AC; 2d4 + 5 damage, and the dagger returns to the river hag.

**Bonded Weapon** (standard; at-will)
The river hag makes two *thrown dagger* attacks.

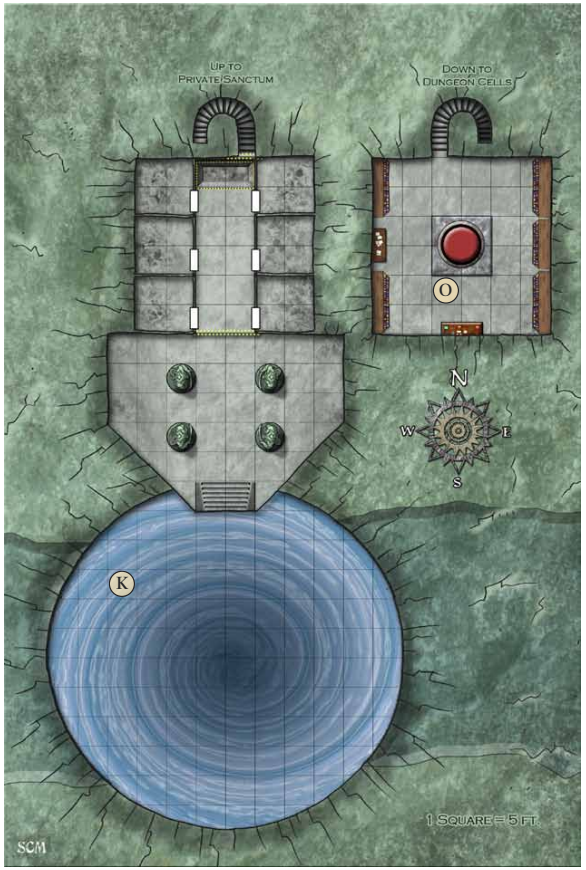
**Drowning Blade** (free, when river hag hits with *dagger*; recharges when the target saves against the effect) ✦ **Weapon**
The target takes ongoing 10 damage (save ends).

**Choking Water Shards** (standard; recharge ⚅)
Area burst 2 within 20; +11 vs. Fortitude; 2d6 + 4 and ongoing 5 (save ends). *Miss:* Half damage.

**Change Shape** (minor; at-will) ✦ **Polymorph**
A river hag can alter its physical form to appear as a young female eladrin, elf, or human. See Change Shape in *Player's Handbook* glossary.

**Water Walk**
The river hag can move on water as if it were solid ground.

**Alignment** Evil **Languages** Common, Elven
**Skills** Bluff +12, Stealth +13
**Str** 14 (+5) **Dex** 20 (+8) **Wis** 12 (+4)
**Con** 16 (+6) **Int** 14 (+5) **Cha** 18 (+7)
**Equipment** curved dagger




## Features of the Area

**Illumination:** Torches cast bright illumination.

**Bed:** The bed provides cover. It costs 2 squares of movement to hop up on the bed. A character can make a DC 15 Strength check to tip over the bed, which can then grant superior cover.

**Bookshelves:** These shelves contain tomes about the god Zehir and magic related to his theology. A DC 15 Arcana or DC 15 Religion check can identify two rituals hidden in the text. Reading these tomes automatically identifies the rituals as Leomund's Secret Chest and Sending. These books also contain illustrated references to a chest used as the focus component for one of the rituals.

**Camouflaged Door:** A reinforced door on the far side of the illusory pit closes off the stairs up to Sacharlim's sanctum. The illusion also makes this door look like a normal part of the wall. A small window with iron bars allows Sacharlim to peer out through the door and see into the corridor and antechamber. This door is locked but can be destroyed with a DC 20 Strength check (AC 5, HP 30).

**Cells:** Twenty villagers are bound by manacles and chains in five of the prison cells. Four have already been transformed into snaketongue initiates and are not bound. The chains and manacles can be destroyed with a DC 25 Strength check (AC 8, HP 20).

**Control Panel:** Similar to the other control panels. Spending a short rest with this device is enough to figure out how to open and close the temple floor drain and activate or dispel the illusory cavern and pit.

**Desk:** A Small creature can move under a desk and possibly gain cover. It costs 2 squares of movement to hop up on a desk. A character can make a DC 10 Strength check to tip over a desk, which can then grant superior cover.

**Illusory Wall:** The illusion of a wall conceals the hallway beyond the antechamber. Once characters interact with the area, a DC 25 Insight check reveals the wall to be an illusion.

**Illusory Pit:** The illusion of a pit 10 feet across and 50 feet deep blocks the end of the hallway. Until the illusion is revealed, characters must make saving throws to catch themselves if forced into the space, the same as they would if the pit were real. If the save succeeds, the illusion is not detected. Once characters interact with the area, a DC 25 Insight check reveals the pit to be a masking illusion. When the illusion disappears, it reveals the level floor and the door beyond.

**Secret Chest:** An ornate chest inlaid with snake designs that is the focus component for a Leomund's Secret Chest ritual. The container is 20 feet underwater and encrusted with natural calcification to blend into the rest of the underground river bottom. If the characters search underwater, a DC 15 Perception or Nature check will spot the chest. If scanning the river from above, a DC 23 Perception check is needed.

**Subterranean River:** A milky, underwater river drains the pool. It provides concealment to partially submerged creatures and total concealment to completely submerged creatures. The water is 20 feet deep and requires a DC 10 Athletics check to swim.

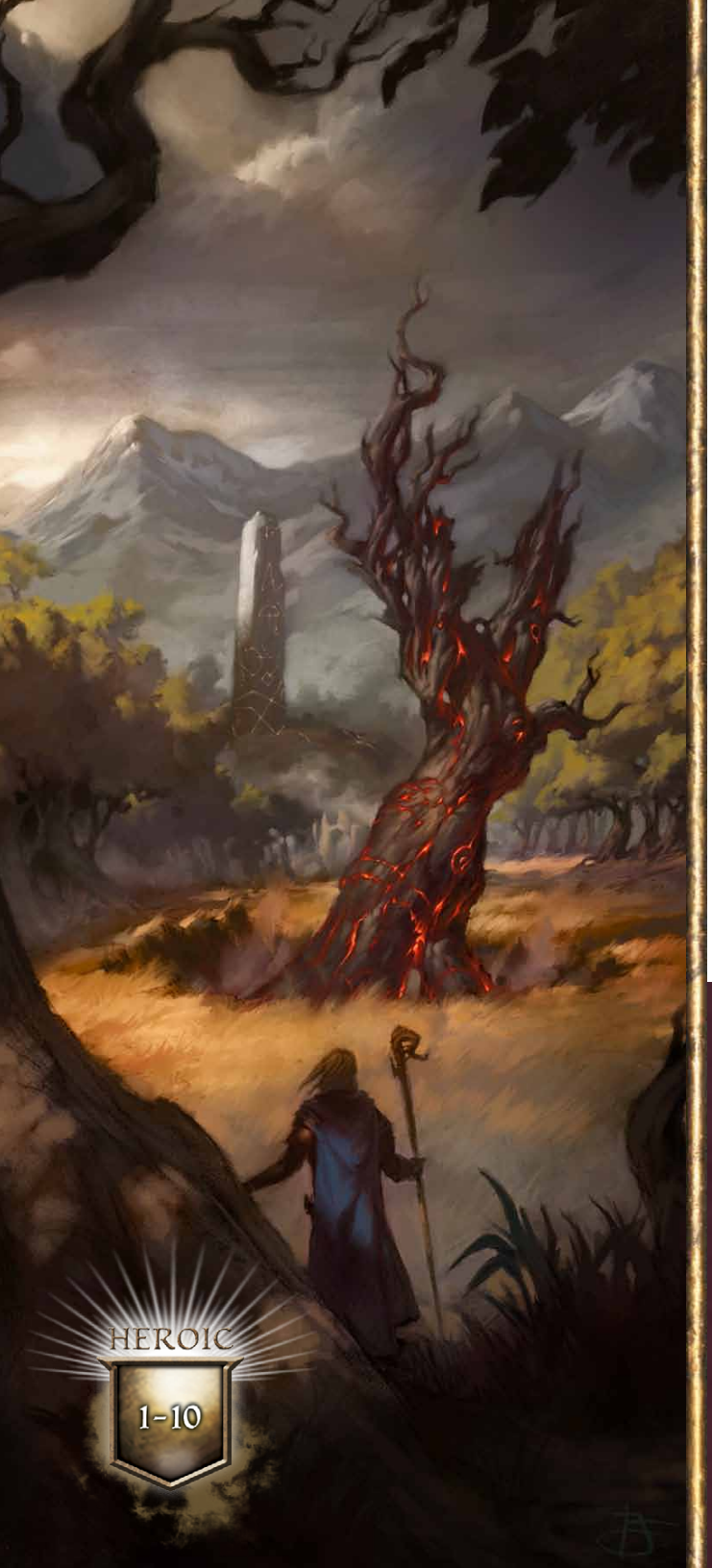
**Yuan-Ti Statues:** Four life-sized stone statues of yuan-ti provide cover. It costs 2 squares of movement to move through a statue's space. A statue can be climbed with a DC 15 Athletics check.

**Treasure:** The arcane tomes in Sacharlim's sanctum contain the rituals Leomund's Secret Chest and Sending. The ritual book that he stores in the secret chest contains Consult Mystic Sages, Skull Watch (*Open Grave* page 50), and Water Breathing. The chest itself is worth 200 gp and holds 1,000 gold pieces along with the ritual book.

### *About the Author*

**Kolja Raven Liquette** is most often found either writing or raising his newborn daughter. He is only mildly disappointed that she wasn't born a kobold, but overjoyed when she realized that d20s are for rolling, not eating. His recent credits include *Races of the Dragon*, *Adventurer's Vault*, and *Remains of the Empire*.

***Dedicated to the artwork and memory of Frank Frazetta.***




# Elves of the Valley

## A Chaos Scar Adventure

*By Robert J. Schwalb*

*illustration by Tyler Jacobson ✦ Cartography by Jason A. Engle*

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CHAOS SCAR™

"Elves of the Valley" is a short adventure for five 1st-level characters that takes place in the Chaos Scar, in a wood not far from the King's Wall. "Elves of the Valley" pits the adventurers against fey bandits corrupted by a demonic entity recently escaped from deeper within the valley. To defeat the growing evil, the adventurers must confront the bandits, navigate an enchanted wood, and confront the darkness staining the copse's heart. If you're not playing a Chaos Scar campaign, you can tie the adventure to any wilderness setting not far from a frontier settlement.

For more details on the Chaos Scar, be sure to read the Chaos Scar introduction and check out its map.

## Background

The darkness within the Chaos Scar waxes and wanes, and from time to time, when evil is at a peak, some malign intelligence slips free, scuttling through the ruined landscape to visit trouble and mayhem onto the surrounding countryside. Many months ago, such an entity quit the valley's depths at great cost and traveled some distance before its strength ran out. It took refuge in a small copse not far from the Old Gate and has spent the days and weeks since trying to recover its spent energy. Although much diminished, its presence alone has poisoned the land around its lair, twisting the hearts and minds of those who live in the wood. With their corruption complete, these new thralls look through insane eyes beyond their lairs and carry forth their master's dark message.

The presence in the woods, known as the Voice in the Darkness, compels the corrupted elves and other villains to strike at travelers, caravans, and even into the surrounding countryside. Burned-out farms and bloated corpses reveal the sort of mercy one might expect at their hands, so local militia from Restwell Keep has been roused to combat the threat. The trouble is that the brigands attack with no rhyme or reason, and often take nothing from their victims, leaving valuables where they lay amid ashes and cooling blood. The militia's impotence spreads a chilling fear throughout the adjacent lands, and the common folk now look to heroes with the pluck and courage to confront the raiders and put an end to their depredations.

## Adventure Synopsis

While the corrupted brigands are at large, the characters pick up a trail left by the raiders near a burned-out farmstead and follow them beyond the King's Wall and into the untamed wilderness surrounding the Chaos Scar. As they near the woods where the evil festers, the heroes are caught in an ambush, where they get their first glimpse of the killers. Defeating these enemies carries the adventurers into a macabre and strange world where all is illusion. Cunning and determined characters may find their way through these pitfalls to face the terrible Voice in the Darkness and his dark champion.

## Involving the Heroes

"Elves in the Valley" takes place in the Chaos Scar. You can use a presented hook to get the characters into the valley and to the first encounter. These hooks also include minor quests that can provide an extra incentive.

### Hook 1: Rescue Mission

A character's mentor, sibling, friend, or loved one was swept up in an attack and has now gone missing. As there is no one else with the wherewithal to rescue the abducted, it falls to the party to undertake the mission. Alternatively, you can easily turn this into a revenge scenario by having the NPC killed rather than taken. Any prisoners the raiders take can be recovered in the "Eyes in the Forest" encounter.

**Minor Quest XP:** 125 XP

### Hook 2: A Second Mission

If the PCs defeated the Brothers Gray (see *Dungeon Magazine* #172) they might have come to the attention of a noble in a nearby barony. After the heroes' success against these renegades, the noble funds their expedition to wipe out these ruthless killers.

**Minor Quest XP:** 100 XP plus 200 gp (parcel 5).

### Hook 3: Happenstance

While on the way to or from another expedition into the Chaos Scar, the characters run afoul of the ambush. Perhaps one of the blackleaf snipers steals something from the characters and flees into the woods, or maybe the adventurers simply recognize the threat these killers pose.

**Minor Quest XP:** 100 XP

## Treasure Preparation

The characters should gain a total of four treasure parcels in this adventure. You can place these parcels wherever you like or you can use recommendations on the following table for placement and composition.

| Parcel | Location | Composition |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | Eyes in the Forest | 10 gp, *potion of healing* |
| 2 | Voice in the Darkness | Level 3 magic item |
| 3 | Voice in the Darkness | Level 2 magic item |
| 4 | Voice in the Darkness | 1,500 sp, 3,000 cp |

# Getting Started

The adventure assumes the characters pick up the trail at a burned-out farmstead a few miles from the King's Wall, but you can use a different opening that fits better with your campaign. If you want to jump into the action, begin with **Tactical Encounter 1**.

*The farmstead's smoldering remains fills the air with acrid smoke. Bloated cows litter the fields around. A few corpses, some burned, reveal only that the attackers were wanton and merciless villains.*

The house is ruins and ash. No survivors remain, as every man, woman, and beast was put to the sword or filled with arrows. The muddy ground, however, holds prints, and characters searching the area find them easily. Following the prints requires two DC 15 Perception checks, one made just outside the farmstead and the other just across the King's Wall. The killers didn't use the Old Gate, instead climbing over the wall and resuming their journey into a small copse. A successful check by 5 or more also reveals the attackers included four quadrupeds, likely wolves, and four lightweight humanoids. Should the characters fail either check, they can still follow the tracks, but the enemies in "Eyes in the Forest" automatically have surprise against the characters.

**Tactical Encounter 1:** "Eyes in the Forest," see page 8.

## Navigating the Woods

The inoffensive small copse is but a façade for the brooding darkness haunting this place, a fact revealed when travelers cross its borders to enter a realm of madness and shadow. Paths shift and change, landmarks vanish, while laughter fills the air. For the heroes to reach the malign presence, they must enter the woods and survive the many perils awaiting them.

The following skill challenge describes the journey to the dark heart of the forest. The journey should take about 6 hours. Each hour, the characters must overcome a new challenge, usually resolved through a group skill check. The characters make progress whether they succeed or fail on the check, but each accumulated failure allows the Voice in the Darkness to make an attack against each character that failed the check.

**Maddening Whispers** (when the characters fail a group skill check made during the "Enchanted Wood" skill challenge)
✦ **Psychic**
Targets each PC in the woods; +5 vs. Will; 1d8 + 5 psychic damage, and the target takes a -2 penalty on all skill checks until the party makes a successful skill check during the skill challenge. Penalties don't accumulate.

## Enchanted Woods

*Distances stretch, trails shift, trees move, rocks dance: Finding your way through this wood will not be easy.*

**Level:** 1

**Complexity:** 2 (requires 6 successes before 3 failures)

**Special:** The characters can attempt a maximum of two skill checks each hour, except in hour 3, which is a separate encounter that can earn them a success toward completing this skill challenge. But they can earn only a maximum of 1 success each hour. This means they have the option to make a second attempt in an hour if they fail at the first, but they still need 1 success each hour of their trip through the woods to successfully complete the skill challenge.

**Primary Skills:** Acrobatics, Arcana, Athletics, Endurance, Insight, Nature, Perception, Stealth, other

**Hour 1:** Arcana or Insight

*Arcana, Insight (DC 15):* The woods' strange character reveals itself in haunting laughter and flitting shadows. The party makes a group skill check using Arcana (to perceive the magical effect) or Insight (to rely on instinct), with a success gained if at least half the PCs succeed on the check. If at least two characters succeed by 5 or more, the party gains a +2 bonus on skill checks made during the next hour. The characters can earn only one success, and a maximum of 1 success, in this hour during this skill challenge.

**Hour 2:** Acrobatics or Athletics

*Acrobatics, Athletics (DC 10):* Thorn bushes, bracken, and small trees block the party's progress. The party makes a group skill check using Acrobatics (to wriggle through the tangles) or Athletics (to bull through the tangles), with a success gained if at least half the characters succeed on the check. In addition to counting as a failure, if half the party fails

the check, every character loses 1 healing surge from injuries sustained from the hostile environment.

**Hour 3:** Other

*Other:* The party comes upon a bog in the forest. Proceed with Tactical Encounter 2: "Boggy Down," see page 11. If the party defeats the enemies, they gain 1 success. If they retreat, they gain 1 failure.

**Hour 4:** Endurance or Nature

*Endurance, Nature (DC 10):* Bloodsucking midges attack the party. The characters make a group skill check using Endurance (to resist the insect clouds) or Nature (to use a balm or some other protection that repels the vermin), with a success gained if at least half the characters succeed. If half the characters fail, the characters take a –2 penalty on all skill checks made for the remainder of the encounter in addition to counting as a failure.

**Hour 5:** Perception

*Perception (DC 15):* Several paths through the woods reveal themselves to the party. The characters make a group skill check to find the tracks and identify false ones. The party gains a success if at least half the characters succeed.

**Hour 6:** Stealth

*Stealth (DC 15):* The adventurers close in on the heart of the woods. If they would approach undetected, they must be quiet. The characters make a group skill check with a success gained if at least half the party succeeds.

**Success:** The characters overcome the woods' strange magic and proceed to Tactical Encounter 3: Voice in the Darkness (see page 13). The characters have surprise for this encounter.

**Defeat:** The characters are thoroughly confused by the wood's strange magic. They proceed to Tactical Encounter 3, as above, but are themselves surprised.

## RESTS

The characters can take short rests in the woods without trouble, but extended rests beneath the strange canopy invite danger. Each hour the characters spend in one place, there's a cumulative 10% chance per hour that something finds them. In the event that this occurs, you should run a level 1 encounter using a mix of creatures drawn from this adventure. A sample encounter would be:

**Level 1 Encounter (XP 550)**

- 1 blackleaf sniper (level 1 artillery, see page 9)
- 3 elf scouts (level 2 skirmisher, see page 11)
- 4 hunting wolves (level 1 minion skirmisher, see page 9)

# 1. Eyes in the Forest

**Encounter Level 1 (575 XP)**

## Setup

**Phystal** (P)
**3 blackleaf snipers** (S)
**4 hunting wolves** (W)

Cruel bandits take positions in the forest and watch for intruders. The bandits and wolves are all hidden until they attack or are detected.

**When the characters near the woods' edge, read:**

*The tracks end not far from the woods' edge. Birch, elms, and maples combined with underbrush and bracken conceal much of what the grove contains.*

**If the enemies have surprise, read:**

*Black arrows hiss out from the foliage signaling an attack!*

**Perception**
**DC 15:** *You notice three concealed pits in the clearing along the forest's edge.*
**DC 18:** *Faint movement reveals a slim humanoid's shape in the foliage.*

## Tactics

The bandits have surprise against the characters unless they succeeded on both Perception checks. With surprise, they are also hidden from any character with a passive Perception score of 17 or less. During the surprise round, Phystal uses *raining arrows* against obvious defenders, while the snipers use *blackleaf arrows* against any targets they are hidden from.

The hunting wolves join the fight during the second round. They protect Phystal first, but if he's not adjacent to any characters, they target isolated characters instead, such as ranged strikers and controllers. The wolves flank their opponents to knock them prone.

For the rest of the combat, the snipers choose different targets, making *shortbow* attacks against any dazed targets. They switch to *blackleaf arrows* only when primary targets save against the dazed condition or when an individual sniper faces a different enemy.

Phystal follows a similar pattern. Once he contains the defenders, he uses *shortbow* attacks or *blackleaf arrow* attacks to slide dazed enemies together until he can use *raining arrows* again. Like the snipers, Phystal makes Stealth checks to hide whenever he can.

**Phystal (P)** **Level 2 Controller (Leader)**
Medium fey humanoid, elf XP 125
**Initiative** +3 **Senses** Perception +6; low-light vision
**Watcher of the Woods** aura 10; all allies in the aura gain a +2 bonus to damage rolls against targets from which they are hidden.
**HP** 35; **Bloodied** 17
**AC** 16; **Fortitude** 15, **Reflex** 15, **Will** 16
**Speed** 7; see also *wild step*
**Scimitar** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
+7 vs. AC; 1d8 + 4 damage.
**Shortbow** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
Ranged 15/30; +7 vs. AC; 1d8 + 5 damage. If Phystal has combat advantage against the target, he can slide the target up to 3 squares.
**Blackleaf Arrow** (standard; requires shortbow; 3/encounter) ✦ **Poison, Weapon**
Phystal makes a shortbow attack. On a hit, Phystal makes a secondary attack against the same target.
*Secondary Attack:* +6 vs. Fortitude; the target is dazed and takes ongoing 3 damage (save ends both).
**Raining Arrows** (standard; requires shortbow; recharge ⚄ ⚅) ✦ **Weapon**
Area burst 1 within 10; targets enemies; +6 vs. Reflex; 2d8 + 2 damage, and the target is immobilized (save ends).
**Elven Accuracy** (free; encounter)
The elf can reroll an attack roll. It must use the second roll, even if it's lower.
**Wild Step**
The elf ignores difficult terrain when it shifts.
**Alignment** Chaotic evil **Languages** Common, Elven
**Skills** Stealth +8
**Str** 14 (+3) **Dex** 14 (+3) **Wis** 11 (+1)
**Con** 11 (+1) **Int** 11 (+1) **Cha** 16 (+4)
**Equipment** hide armor, scimitar, shortbow, quiver with 20 arrows

**3 Blackleaf Snipers (S)** **Level 1 Artillery**
Medium fey humanoid, elf XP 100 each

**Initiative** +7 **Senses** Perception +6; low-light vision
**HP** 32; **Bloodied** 16
**AC** 15; **Fortitude** 12, **Reflex** 15, **Will** 13
**Speed** 7; see also *wild step*

⊕ **Short Sword** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
+6 vs. AC; 1d6 + 4 damage.

➶ **Shortbow** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
Ranged 15/30; +8 vs. AC; 1d8 + 5 damage.

➶ **Blackleaf Arrow** (standard; requires shortbow; 3/encounter) ✦ **Poison, Weapon**
The sniper makes a shortbow attack. On a hit, the sniper makes a secondary attack against the same target. *Secondary Attack:* +6 vs. Fortitude; the target is dazed and takes ongoing 3 poison damage (save ends both).

**Elven Accuracy** (free; encounter)
The elf can reroll an attack roll. It must use the second roll, even if it's lower.

**Wild Step**
The elf ignores difficult terrain when it shifts.

**Alignment** Chaotic evil **Languages** Common, Elven
**Skills** Athletics +4, Stealth +8
**Str** 9 (–1) **Dex** 16 (+3) **Wis** 12 (+1)
**Con** 10 (+0) **Int** 10 (+0) **Cha** 11 (+0)
**Equipment** leather armor, short sword, longbow, quiver with 20 arrows

**4 Hunting Wolves (W)** **Level 2 Minion Skirmisher**
Medium natural beast XP 31 each

**Initiative** +5 **Senses** Perception +7; low-light vision
**HP** 1; a missed attack never damages a minion.
**AC** 16; **Fortitude** 14, **Reflex** 14, **Will** 13
**Speed** 8

⊕ **Bite** (standard; at-will)
+7 vs. AC; 4 damage (5 damage against a prone target). If the wolf has combat advantage against the target, the target falls prone.

**Alignment** Unaligned **Languages** –
**Str** 13 (+2) **Dex** 14 (+3) **Wis** 13 (+2)
**Con** 14 (+3) **Int** 2 (-3) **Cha** 10 (+1)

**Concealed Pit**

*The ground gives way and drops you into a pit.*

**At-Will**
**Opportunity Action** **Melee**
**Trigger:** A Medium or smaller character enters a square containing a pit.
**Target:** The triggering creature
**Attack:** +4 vs. Reflex
**Hit:** The target falls 10 feet into the pit, takes 1d10 damage, and is knocked prone. A target can climb out of the pit with a DC 10 Athletics check
**Miss:** The target returns to the square it last occupied and its move action ends.

## Interrogating a Prisoner

The elves prove uncooperative if captured, but persistent characters might be able to ferret out information about their purpose and master. Phystal, however, cannot be interrogated.

## Interrogating the Prisoners

*To learn something from the prisoner, you must get past the defiance revealed in its soulless black eyes.*

**Level:** 1 (100 XP)

**Complexity:** 1 (requires 4 successes before 3 failures).

**Primary Skills:** Arcana, Diplomacy, Insight, Intimidate

*Arcana (DC 15, 1 success, maximum 2 successes):* The first successful check identifies the magical curse afflicting the prisoner as having an elemental origin. Success by 5 or more also grants the character a +2 bonus to the next Arcana check made. A second successful check lifts the curse. In addition to counting as a failure, a failed Arcana check also deals 5 psychic damage to the character that made the check.

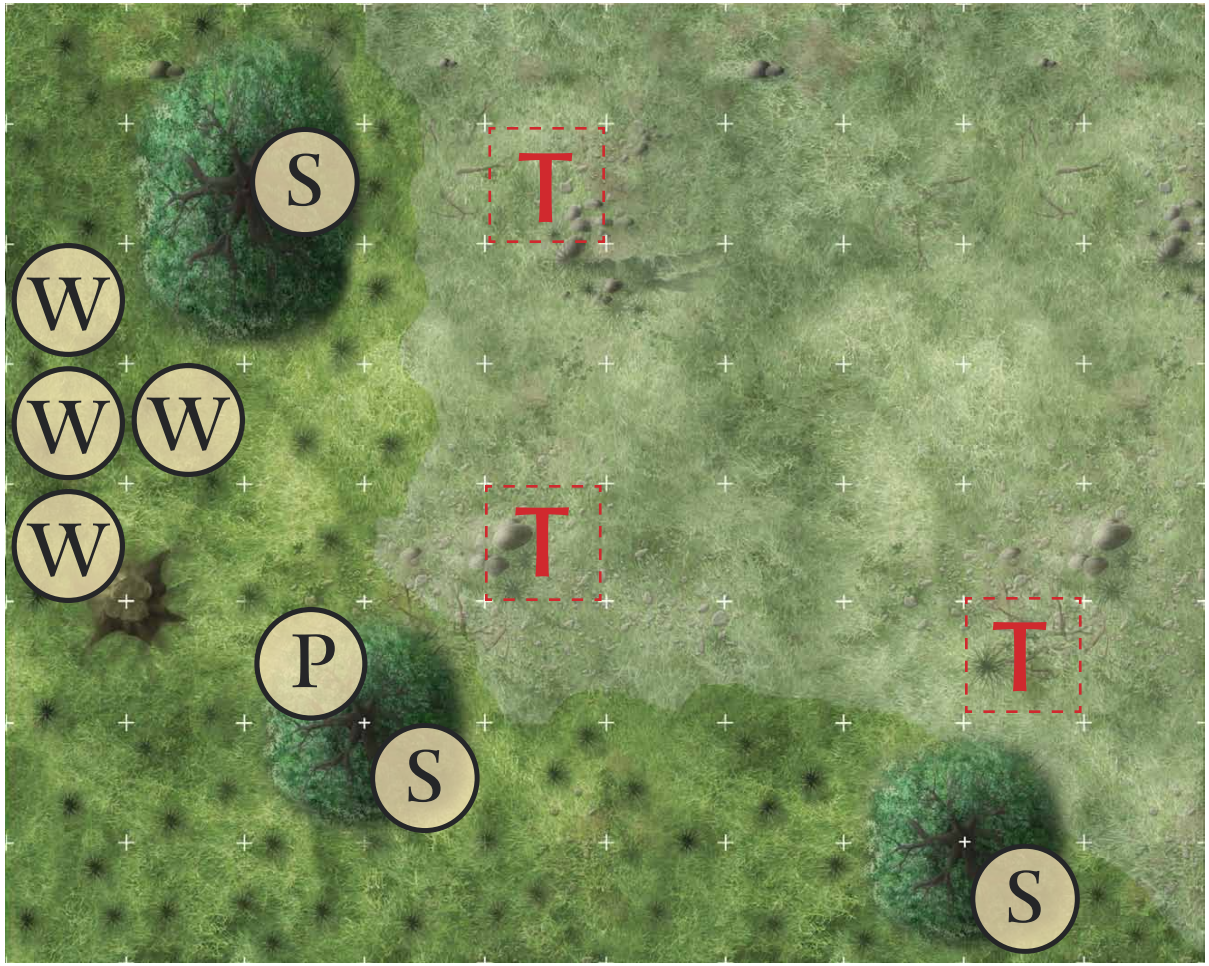
*Diplomacy (DC 10, 1 success, requires 2 successes from Arcana, maximum 2 successes):* The first successful check calms the prisoner. The second successful check helps the elf set aside the crushing guilt for the crimes he or she committed. Diplomacy checks attempted before gaining the requisite number of Arcana checks result in automatic failures.

*Insight (DC 10, 1 success, maximum 1 success):* A successful check reveals the elf is ensorcelled and opens up the Arcana skill.

*Intimidate (DC 17 or 5, 1 success, maximum 4 successes):* Use the higher DC if the PCs have not yet accumulated 2 successes from Arcana. Each successful check breaks down the prisoner's will.

**Victory:** The characters lift the enchantment corrupting the prisoner's mind. The freed elf reveals, "There is evil in these woods, ancient and abominable. It whispers in the darkness, poisoning our minds with its vile words. Beware, friends, lest you succumb to the same corruption." The elf warns the adventurers that others haunt the woods. All is not as it seems in the forest, and it's easy to become turned around. The elf offers to lead the characters to the Voice in the Darkness, granting the characters a +2 bonus on any skill checks related to the "Enchanted Woods" skill challenge. However, the elf flees at the start of any combat encounter.

**Defeat:** The elf explodes in a burst of harmless, disgusting black filth.




## Features of the Area

**Light Forest:** Underbrush and low-hanging branches make light forest squares lightly obscured. An attack that deals 5 or more points of fire damage to a lightly obscured square clears away the foliage.

**Underbrush:** Squares containing underbrush are difficult terrain.

**Concealed Pits (T):** Three pits protect the forest's edge.

**Treasure:** Phystal carries a leather belt pouch containing parcel 1, which consists of 10 gp and a *potion of healing*.

## 2. Boggy Down

**Encounter Level 1 (550 XP)**

### Setup

**1 mud lasher** (M)
**3 elf scouts** (E)

The three elf scouts hide in dense forest squares. The mud lasher lurks beneath the black scum covering the bog. Do not place hidden enemies on the map until they attack or are detected.

**When the characters enter this area, read:**

*Pockets of dense forest mingle with the rest of the woods but you can still make out a small clearing containing a bog in its center.*

**Perception**
**DC 20:** *Slight movement reveals a slim form hidden in the trees.*

### Tactics

The mud lasher emerges from the bog when any creature enters the clearing. It uses *drowning slam* and *slam* against any enemy it can reach, switching to *mud ball* when there are no nearby enemies.

The elves remain hidden until the characters are within attack range of the mud lasher. Once the elemental attacks, they leap from their perches in the trees and attack with surprise, unless they were spotted. They use *wild step* to shift through the thick, cloying mud of the bog, making *two-weapon rend* attacks as often as possible, and trying to flank with one another and them mud lasher.

**Mud Lasher (M)** **Level 4 Brute**
Medium elemental magical beast (earth, water) XP 175
**Initiative** +4 **Senses** Perception +9; low-light vision
**HP** 63; **Bloodied** 31
**AC** 16; **Fortitude** 17, **Reflex** 15, **Will** 15
**Immune** disease, poison
**Speed** 5

⊕ **Slam** (standard; at-will)
+7 vs. AC; 2d8 + 4 damage.

⸸ **Drowning Slam** (standard; encounter)
+5 vs. Fortitude; 2d8 + 4 damage, and ongoing 5 damage (save ends). *Miss:* Half damage.

➢ **Mud Ball** (standard; at-will)
Ranged 10; +5 vs. Reflex; the target is slowed (save ends). If the target is already slowed, it is instead immobilized (save ends).

**Amorphous Body** (immediate reaction, when hit by a melee attack; encounter)
The mud lasher shifts 3 squares.

**Relentless Assault**
A mud lasher gains a +2 bonus to attack rolls against slowed or immobilized creatures.

**Alignment** Unaligned **Languages** Primordial
**Skills** Stealth +9
**Str** 18 (+6) **Dex** 15 (+4) **Wis** 15 (+4)
**Con** 13 (+3) **Int** 8 (+1) **Cha** 11 (+2)

**Elf Scout** **Level 2 Skirmisher**
Medium fey humanoid, elf XP 125
**Initiative** +7 **Senses** Perception +10; low-light vision
**Group Awareness** aura 5; non-elf allies in the aura gain a +1 racial bonus to Perception checks.
**HP** 39; **Bloodied** 19
**AC** 16; **Fortitude** 13, **Reflex** 15, **Will** 13
**Speed** 6; see also *wild step*

⊕ **Longsword** (standard, at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
+7 vs AC; 1d8 + 4 damage.

⊕ **Short Sword** (standard, at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
+7 vs AC; 1d6 + 4 damage.

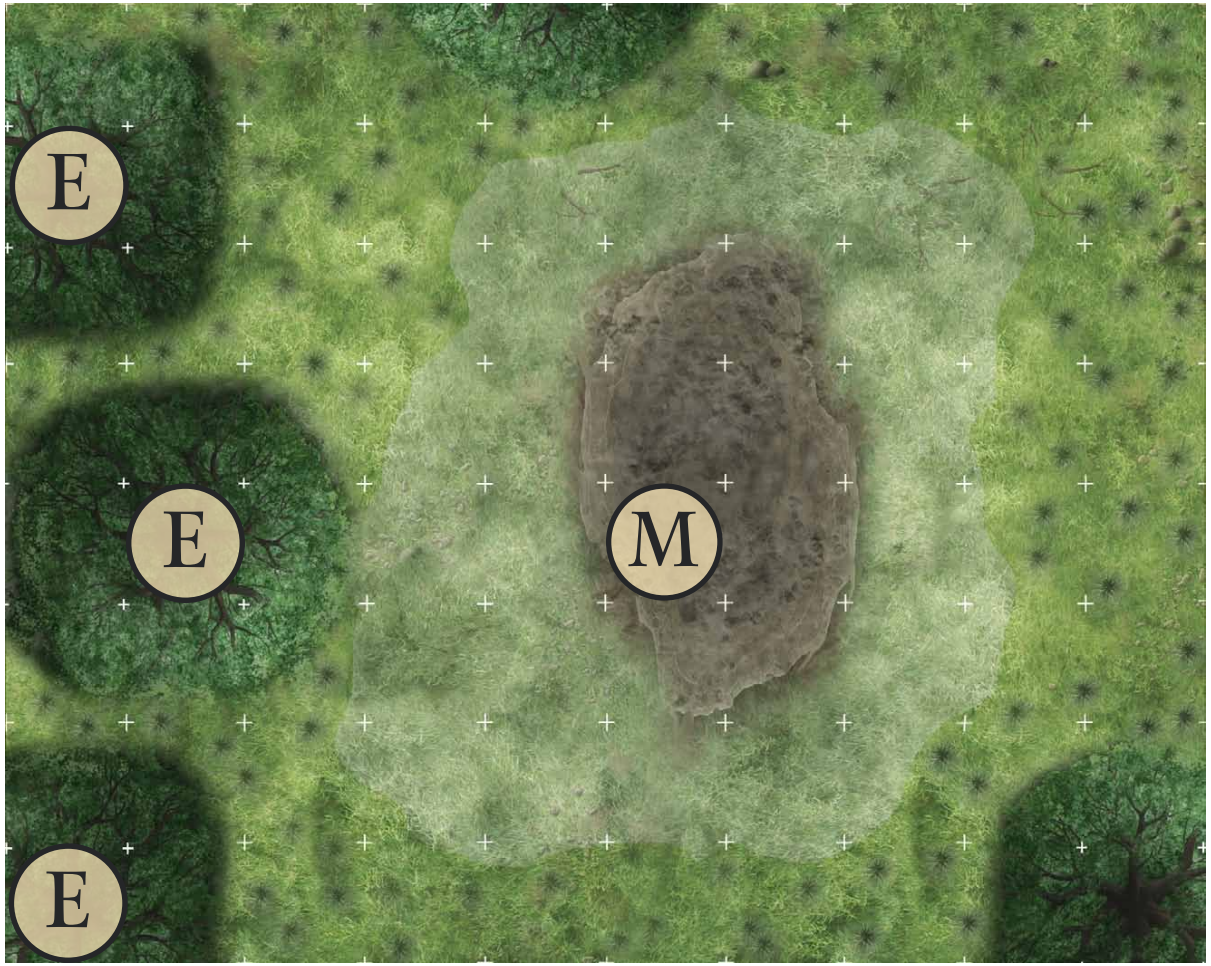
⸸ **Two-Weapon Rend** (standard, encounter) ✦ **Weapon**
The elf scout makes a *longsword* attack and a *short sword* attack against the same target. If both attacks hit, the elf scout deals an additional 4 damage.

**Elven Accuracy** (free; encounter)
An elf can reroll an attack roll. It must use the second roll, even if it's lower.

**Combat Advantage**
An elf scout that has combat advantage deals an extra 1d6 damage on its attacks.

**Wild Step**
An elf ignores difficult terrain when it shifts.

**Alignment** Any **Languages** Common, Elven
**Skills** Nature +10, Stealth +9
**Str** 12 (+2) **Dex** 18 (+5) **Wis** 14 (+3)
**Con** 15 (+3) **Int** 10 (+1) **Cha** 12 (+2)
**Equipment** chainmail, longsword, short sword




## Features of the Area

**Dense Forest:** Squares containing dense forest are heavily obscured and count as difficult terrain.

**Light Forest:** All other forest squares are lightly obscured.

**Bog:** A small bog covered in foul scum stands in a clearing. Squares containing the bog are difficult terrain. A character knocked prone in the bog cannot stand unless he or she first succeeds on a DC 10 Acrobatics or Athletics check.

# 3. Voice in the Darkness

**Encounter Level 4 (950 XP)**

## Setup

**Anise** (A)
**1 fey panther** (P)
**3 bloodthorn vines** (B)
**Voice in the Darkness** (V)

A clearing in the woods' heart is home to the diseased entity behind the area's corruption. The Voice in the Darkness is a demonic entity which recently escaped from deeper within the Chaos Scar. It hid in a mighty tree but was so weak that it became bound to the wood and is now unable to escape. The situation suits it, however, as it can work its evil through the fey creatures that serve it. Anise and the fey panther are hidden behind the ruined walls, so don't place them yet. The bloodthorn vines and the tree, however, are visible.

**When the characters enter this area, read:**

*You emerge from the malicious woods and find yourselves in a wide clearing littered with ruins. Evil radiates from a large tree with black bark and bare branches that rises from a depression in the clearing's center. Tangled, thorny vines twitch and creep around the tree. Across the clearing, an old monolith crawling with runes stands atop a bare hillock.*

**When the characters see the fey panther, read:**

*A sleek panther with tufted ears and striped fur fixes you with baleful eyes.*

**When the characters see Anise, read:**

*A pale warrior comes into view wielding two blades and wearing black mail. His face is twisted into a hateful mask. He screams shrilly, causing the air to bend and waver around him.*

**When the characters see the tree, read:**

*Swirling mist issues from a dark crevice in the tree's trunk, and from with the stinking expulsion you hear a faint and terrible voice.*

**Arcana**
**DC 10:** *Strange portals hang in the air. Moving through them will teleport you to a random location.*

**DC 15:** *Magical energy wells up from the monolith, power that could aid you in the struggle here.*

| **Anise the Chaos Warrior (A)** | **Level 1 Elite Brute** |
|---|---|
| Medium fey humanoid, elf | XP 200 |
| **Initiative** +6 | **Senses** Perception +9; low-light vision |
| **Destructive Wake** aura 5; any enemy in the aura takes a -5 penalty to saving throws against ongoing damage. | |
| **HP** 70; **Bloodied** 35 | |
| **AC** 13; **Fortitude** 12, **Reflex** 14, **Will** 12 | |
| **Resist** 5 variable (1/encounter) | |
| **Saving Throws** +2 | |
| **Speed** 6; see also *wild step* | |
| **Action Points** 1 | |
| **Longsword** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**<br>+6 vs. AC; 1d8 + 7 damage. | |
| **Short Sword** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**<br>+6 vs. AC; 1d6 + 5 damage. | |
| **Two-Weapon Rend** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**<br>Anise makes a *longsword* attack and a *short sword* attack against the same target. If both attacks hit, Anise deals 4 extra damage. | |
| **Destabilizing Breath** (standard; encounter) ✦ **Varies**<br>Close blast 5; +4 vs. AC; 2d6 + 2 cold, fire, lightning, or thunder damage, and the target takes ongoing 5 damage of that type and a -2 penalty to AC and Fortitude (save ends both). | |
| **Elven Accuracy** (free; encounter)<br>Anise can reroll an attack roll. He must use the second roll, even if it's lower. | |
| **Combat Advantage**<br>Anise's deals 1d6 extra damage on all attacks against targets he has combat advantage against. | |
| **Devastating Assault**<br>When Anise hits with a charge attack or hits a creature granting combat advantage to him, the attack also deals ongoing 5 damage (save ends). | |
| **Wild Step**<br>Anise ignores difficult terrain when he shifts. | |
| **Alignment** Chaotic evil | **Languages** Common, Elven |
| **Skills** Nature +9, Stealth +13 | |
| **Str** 12 (+1) | **Dex** 18 (+4) **Wis** 14 (+2) |
| **Con** 15 (+2) | **Int** 10 (+0) **Cha** 12 (+1) |
| **Equipment** chainmail, longsword, short sword | |

**Fey Panther (P)** **Level 4 Skirmisher**
Medium fey beast XP 175

**Initiative** +8 **Senses** Perception +8; low-light vision
**HP** 54; **Bloodied** 27
**AC** 18; **Fortitude** 16, **Reflex** 18, **Will** 15
**Speed** 8, climb 6; see also *fey step*

⊕ **Bite** (standard; at-will)
+9 vs. AC; 1d6 + 4 damage, and the fey panther shifts 1 square.

**Charging Pounce**
When the fey panther hits with a charge attack, it deals 1d6 extra damage and knocks the target prone.

**Fey Step** (move; encounter) ✦ **Teleportation**
The fey panther teleports 5 squares.

**Alignment** Unaligned **Languages** –
**Skills** Stealth +11
**Str** 14 (+4) **Dex** 18 (+6) **Wis** 13 (+3)
**Con** 14 (+4) **Int** 2 (-2) **Cha** 11 (+2)

**3 Bloodthorn Vines (B)** **Level 2 Soldier**
Medium natural beast (plant) XP 125 each

**Initiative** +3 **Senses** Perception +3; blindsight 10
**HP** 41; **Bloodied** 20
**AC** 18; **Fortitude** 15, **Reflex** 12, **Will** 14
**Speed** 5 (forest walk)

⊕ **Striking Vine** (standard; at-will)
+9 vs. AC; 1d8 + 5 damage.

**Impaling Thorn** (standard; recharges when the bloodthorn vine doesn't have a creature grabbed) ✦ **Healing**
The vine impales the target's flesh with a thorn: +9 vs. Fortitude; 1d8 + 4 damage, and the target is grabbed.
*Sustain Standard:* The vine sustains the grab, the target takes 2d8 + 4 damage, and the vine regains 5 hit points.

**Pulling Vines** (minor; at-will)
The bloodthorn vine shifts 1 square, pulling any creature grabbed by it into a space adjacent to it.

**Alignment** Unaligned **Languages** –
**Str** 17 (+4) **Dex** 10 (+1) **Wis** 14 (+3)
**Con** 17 (+4) **Int** 2 (-3) **Cha** 6 (-1)

**Voice in the Darkness (V)** **Level 1 Elite Controller (Leader)**
Large elemental magical beast (blind, plant) XP 200

**Initiative** -1 **Senses** Perception +2; blind, blindsight 10
**HP** 60; **Bloodied** 30
**AC** 15; **Fortitude** 14, **Reflex** 13, **Will** 15
**Immune** blinded, gaze, sleep; **Vulnerable** 10 fire
**Saving Throws** +2
**Speed** 0
**Action Points** 1

⊕ **Grasping Roots** (standard; at-will)
Reach 3; +5 vs. Reflex; 1d6 + 3 damage, and the target is grabbed. The voice can grab up to two creatures at one time.

**Twisted Nature** (minor 1/round; at-will)
Reach 10; targets a twig blight ally; the target makes a melee basic attack with a +2 bonus to the attack roll.

**Psychic Lance** (standard; at-will) ✦ Psychic
Close burst 10; one or two creatures in burst; +5 vs. Will; 1d6 + 3 psychic damage, and the target is dazed until the end of its next turn.

**Insidious Whispers** (standard; recharges when the voice has no spawned twig blights) ✦ **Psychic**
Close burst 3; enemies in burst; +5 vs. Will; 1d6 + 3 psychic damage, and the target makes a melee basic attack against a creature the voice chooses.

**Blightborn Calling** (minor; recharge ⚁ ⚂ ⚄ ⚅)
Close burst 5; The voice spawns four blightborn twig blights in unoccupied squares within the burst, and the twig blights act immediately. The twig blights remain until destroyed or until the end of the encounter. The twig blights act on the voice's turn. The voice can have up to six twig blights at a time.

**Abyssal Cry** (free, when damaged by an attack; recharges when a bloodthorn vine drops to 0 hit points)
Close burst10; targets non-minion allies; the target gains 10 temporary hit points and a +1 bonus to attack rolls until the end of its next turn.

**Fear of Annihilation** (while bloodied)
The voice gains a +4 bonus to damage rolls.

**Threatening Reach**
The voice can make opportunity attacks against all enemies within its reach (3 squares).

**Alignment** Chaotic evil **Languages** Abyssal
**Str** 13 (+1) **Dex** 8 (-1) **Wis** 14 (+2)
**Con** 14 (+2) **Int** 12 (+1) **Cha** 17 (+3)

**Blightborn Twig Blight** **Level 1 Minion**
Small fey humanoid (plant) XP –

**Initiative** +3 **Senses** Perception +6
**HP** 1; a missed attack never damages a minion.
**AC** 15; **Fortitude** 11, **Reflex** 15, **Will** 13
**Speed** 7 (forest walk), climb 5

⊕ **Claw** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Poison**
+6 vs. AC; 2 poison damage (3 poison damage with combat advantage).

**Alignment** Chaotic evil **Languages** Elven
**Skills** Perception +6, Stealth +16
**Str** 7 (-2) **Dex** 17 (+3) **Wis** 12 (+1)
**Con** 7 (-2) **Int** 5 (-3) **Cha** 10 (+0)

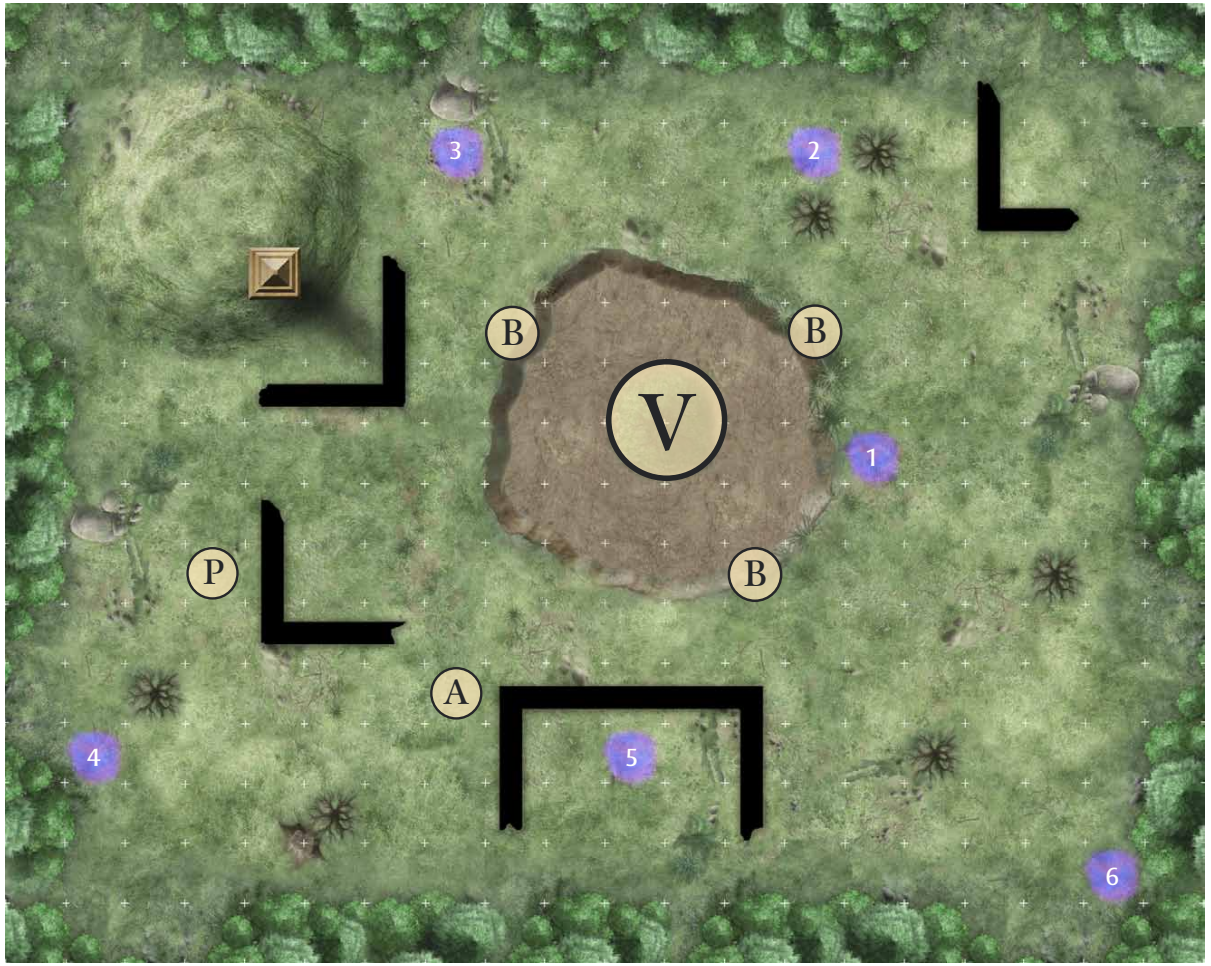
## Tactics

The creatures regard the characters' intrusion as the worst affront and fight to the death to protect the tree.

The Voice in the Darkness uses *blightborn calling* on its first action, then follows up with *psychic lance*. On its next turn, it uses *psychic lance* and then spends an action point to use *insidious whispers*, provided several characters are in range. The voice can make opportunity attacks against enemies within 3 squares thanks to *threatening reach*, and it directs its minions to target grabbed melee strikers. Whenever it recharges *blightborn calling*, it refreshes its minions. Should it become imperiled, it uses *desperate cry* to invigorate its allies.

The bloodthorn vines protect the tree, using *impaling thorn* to grab and drag attackers away from the tree and then move back to stay within 3 squares of the hazard.

Anise and the fey panther close on the characters, using twisted space squares (see Features of the Area) to attack the characters from unexpected directions or simply closing the distance through movement. They focus on characters that hang back, the panther charging when possible, and Anise hitting groups with *destabilizing breath* and then charging.




## Features of the Area

**Hillock:** A small hill rises from the clearing. Slope squares leading up the hill are difficult terrain.

**Monolith:** A stone monolith stands atop the hill, a vestige from another time. The first character to touch the stone regains the use of an expended encounter attack power.

**Ruins:** Pitted and crumbling walls still stand in this clearing. The walls count as blocking terrain. The walls are 8 feet tall. A character can climb a wall with a successful DC 10 Athletics check. A square of wall has AC 5, Reflex 5, Fortitude 10; hp 40.

**Warped Trees:** The Voice in the Darkness corrupted the few trees in the clearing, giving them fleshy bark, leathery leaves, and blood for sap. Any creature starting its turn in a square adjacent to a warped tree is slowed until the start of its next turn.

**Twisted Space:** The demonic entity's mere presence has weakened reality in places, opening unstable portals around the battlefield. Whenever a creature enters a square containing warped space, roll 1d6. The creature teleports to an unoccupied square adjacent to the portal corresponding to the result on the die.

**Sinking Pit:** The massive tree holding the Voice in the Darkness rises from a shallow depression in the clearing's center. All squares in the depression and around the tree count as difficult terrain. Creatures with earth walk or forest walk ignore this difficult terrain.

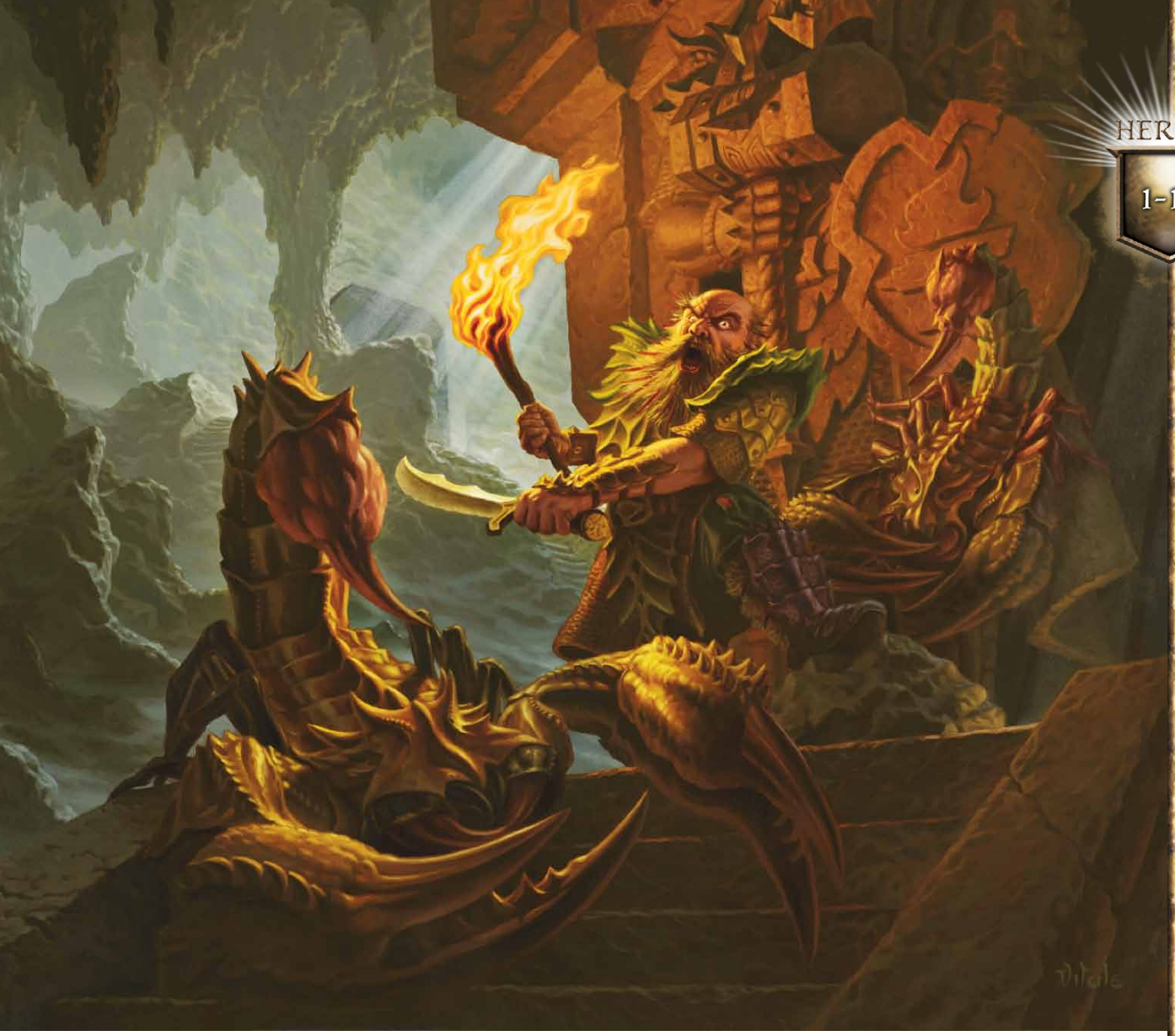
**Treasure:** Scattered among the roots at the base of the tree are three parcels including two magic items (level 2 and 3), 1,500 sp, and 3,000 cp.

## Conclusion

Upon destroying the Voice in the Darkness, the woods return to a normal and natural state. The remaining bands still at large in the countryside separate in confusion as the enchantment breaks. Many are overcome with shame and grief at what they have done. Some return to the Chaos Scar to seek vengeance against the more powerful terrors and others leave the region altogether. At your discretion, the contamination might linger in a few elves. Such enemies would undoubtedly seek revenge on those who destroyed their master.

### *About the Author*

**Robert J. Schwalb** is an award-winning game designer whose work can be found in numerous roleplaying sourcebooks and accessories. His most recent work can be found in the *Dark Sun Campaign Setting*, *Dark Sun Creature Catalog*, *Monster Manual 3*, and the *Player's Handbook 3*. Robert lives in Tennessee.



HEROIC
1–10

CHAOS SCAR™

# The Crawling Fane

*By Aeryn "Blackdirge" Rudel*

*illustration by Raoul Vitale ✦ cartography by Jason A. Engle*

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"The Crawling Fane" is an adventure for 3rd-level characters. It takes place in a ruined temple of the dwarven god Moradin within the Chaos Scar. The adventure pits the characters against the machinations of a crazed duergar cleric devoted to an alien deity with dominion over giant insects and other crawling monstrosities. The heroes must recover the weapon of an ancient dwarven hero, reclaim Moradin's temple, and thwart the emergence of a new and terrible evil within the Chaos Scar.

## Background

Hargash Bitterblade is a rather eccentric duergar. He has forsaken the worship of the proper duergar gods and instead worships a bizarre entity he calls Chitteruk, which claims dominion over vermin and all things that creep and crawl. Years ago, Hargash fled a large duergar city to escape certain death for his heresy and devotion to his alien god. He and a few of his more fervent followers traveled many years through the Underdark until, finally, the entity that Hargash serves sent him a dream. The dream provided the location of a long-forgotten temple dedicated to the dwarven god Moradin. Hargash was commanded to re-sanctify the temple in the name of Chitteruk.

Although Hargash's vision was sent by an evil entity, it did not come from Chitteruk—because no such creature actually exists. The dream was sent by the great meteorite in the Chaos Scar, which has deluded Hargash and his followers into its service. The temple to Moradin is within the Chaos Scar. In the last few months, Hargash and his small band of followers have moved into the temple. They have been slowly remaking the temple into a place suitable for the worship of Chitteruk. For his endeavors, Hargash has been gifted with uncanny power over verminous monsters. This power comes from the meteorite and not from Hargash's imaginary god, but it is real power nonetheless. Hargash has filled his new home with all manner of creeping, crawling monstrosities. This includes a small group of ettercaps, also drawn to the area by the meteorite.

Recently, Hargash has been receiving waking visions from the meteorite in the guise of Chitteruk. In these visions, Chitteruk shows Hargash a band of heroes, a meddling group of do-gooders who intend to thwart Chitteruk's plans for the fane. Through Chitteruk, the meteorite commands Hargash to destroy these heroes and remove their influence from the area. It just so happens that the heroes are currently in the Chaos Scar; in fact, they are right above Hargash's head . . . .

## Getting the Characters Involved

"The Crawling Fane" takes place in the Chaos Scar. You can use one of the hooks below to get the adventurers into the valley and exploring the lost temple of Moradin, or any other of your own devising.

**Hook 1: The Hammer of Ivak Stoneblood.** Torak Banehammer, a dwarven cleric of Moradin, is searching for a lost relic sacred to his faith. The relic, the Hammer of Ivak, was lost when the temple of Moradin in the Chaos Scar was destroyed. Torak believes he knows the location of the lost temple of Moradin and asks the heroes to seek it out and recover the Hammer of Ivak. To aid the characters in their endeavor, Torak offers up his own magical hammer, a *+1 thundering warhammer* to any hero who can wield it.

**Quest XP:** 250 xp for finding the *Hammer of Ivak* and returning it to Torak.

**Hook 2: Big Bugs.** Giant, venomous insects and other monstrous vermin have attacked and poisoned people near the King's Wall. A druid asks the characters to obtain the venom sacks from five venomous giant bugs (centipedes, scorpions, or spiders) so she can produce an antivenin. She offers 10 gp for each venom sack obtained and promises the adventurers two doses of antivenom (*Adventurer's Vault* page 25) if they bring back at least five venom sacks. A venom sack can be recovered from a slain bug with a DC 10 Nature check.

**Quest XP:** 250 xp for collecting five venom sacks.

**Hook 3: We Aren't Going to Take It!** The characters could witness bug attacks against innocent people and decide to do something about it instead of waiting for someone to ask. Or, they themselves could come under attack by giant bugs on their way into or out of the Scar and rightly conclude that the bugs represent a larger problem . . . or that their lair probably contains treasure.

**Quest XP:** 250 xp for seizing the initiative.

In the last two cases, finding the temple is relatively easy. The characters need only watch for the bugs and follow them back to their nest.

## Treasure Preparation

The following treasure parcels are available in "The Crawling Fane."

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Parcel 1:** | Temple Ruins | One *potion of healing* + 25 gp |
| **Parcel 2:** | The Rectory | One level 4 magic item |
| **Parcel 3:** | Hall of the Honored Dead | Two 100-gp gems + 250 sp |
| **Parcel 4:** | The Profaned Chapel | One level 6 magic item |

## Synopsis

The adventure occurs in four encounters.

### 1. Temple Ruins

**Read or paraphrase the following when the characters reach the above-ground temple ruins:**

*Before you, the crumbling shape of a long-abandoned ruin juts from the wild landscape of the Chaos Scar. The ruin stands open to the sky, and its once sturdy walls are now little more than weed-choked rubble. Two towering statues, each so weathered and eroded that its features are impossible to make out, flank what was once the main entrance. It is hard to imagine this sad, forgotten structure was once sacred to the faith of Moradin.*

**Tactical Encounter 1:** *Temple Ruins (page 7)*

### 2. Ancient Rectory

In order to access the lower levels of the temple complex, the characters need to climb down the gaping chasm created by Hargash's ritual in encounter 1. There they get ambushed by Hargash's fanatical followers.

**Tactical Encounter 2:** Ancient Rectory (page 9)

### 3. The Hall of Honored Dead

This room once housed the remains of dwarves who died performing a vital service for Moradin, including the great dwarven hero Ivak Stoneblood. It has suffered at the hands of Hargash and his minions; the large statues of Moradin have been defaced just like the images on the altars in the rectory. In addition, Hargash has opened three of the sarcophagi, disturbing the remains and looting their valuables. The last sarcophagus—the one holding the remains of Ivak Stoneblood—has so far defeated all of Hargash's attempts to open it. In fact, Moradin himself has prevented the duergar from tampering with Ivak's resting place and gaining access to the mighty treasure within.

Hargash's minions use this room as a holding pen for the giant insects and other vermin he commands. Currently, the room houses two deathjump spiders, three fire beetles, and their ettercap handler.

**Tactical Encounter 3:** The Hall of Honored Dead (page 12)

### 4. The Profaned Chapel

This grand chapel was once the primary center of worship in the temple. It is also where Hargash and his minions first entered the ruins from the Underdark, tunneling up from the subterranean darkness as directed by Chitteruk. Hargash's power is slowly growing as the great meteorite, in the guise of the vermin god Chitteruk, steadily transfers a small portion of its unholy energy to the crazed duergar.

Hargash spends the majority of his time in the chapel, praying continuously to Chitteruk. This unceasing devotion strengthens the great meteorite's power within the temple and further erodes Moradin's influence in his own place of worship. Soon, the temple will be a dedicated place of worship for Chitteruk—meaning the great meteorite itself. This would increase the meteorite's power and influence in the Chaos Scar valley unless Hargash can be defeated here.

When the adventurers reach this room, Hargash is kneeling before the great statue of Chitteruk and chanting in Infernal. A duergar shock trooper bodyguard and some of Hargash's favorite vermin are also here at the ready should their master need them.

**Tactical Encounter 4:** The Profaned Chapel (page 15)

## Wrapping Up

With the death of Hargash, the nascent cult of Chitteruk dies and the great meteorite's influence in the Chaos Scar is lessened, if only by a fraction. The temple of Moradin is still tainted with the evil of Hargash and his followers. The heroes can gain favor with the deity if they take the steps necessary to expunge all signs of Hargash's evil from his temple. Repairing the disfigured images of Moradin and performing the proper funeral rites for the dwarven heroes whose sarcophagi were violated can earn the characters another 250 XP. In addition, if one of the adventurers is a worshipper of Moradin, the deity grants him or her the level 3 divine boon *Moradin's Blessing of Iron* (*Dungeon Master's Guide 2* page 151).

Completely reclaiming the temple may be beyond the ability of the characters at their current level. The rubble-choked passageway in area 4, however, is the route by which Hargash and his disciples entered the temple from the Underdark. It can lead to further adventure in the ruined lower levels of the temple, where more powerful dwarven relics could be waiting for adventurers brave enough to claim them.

# 1: Temple Ruins

**Encounter Level 3 (XP 800)**

## Setup

**1 ettercap webspinner**
**2 ettercap fang guards**
**2 centipede swarms**

Thanks to his many insect spies, Hargash is aware whenever intruders approach the temple ruins. As soon as the heroes enter the ruins, Hargash completes a powerful ritual that shakes and cracks the earth. The ritual opens a chasm in the ground that connects with the subterranean sections of the ruined temple. From this chasm climb ettercaps and poisonous centipedes, servants of Hargash and his god Chitteruk.
**When Hargash completes his ritual, read:**

*The air is suddenly filled with the grating rumble of rock. The earth splits into a gaping chasm not far from where you stand. The ground beneath your feet bucks like some colossal, angry beast, and you must struggle to keep your balance.*

Each character must make a Dexterity check (DC 9) to avoid being knocked prone. The shaking stops on the following round, and moments later, ettercaps and centipedes swarm out of the chasm created by the ritual to attack the adventurers.

## Tactics

In the first round of combat, the ettercap fang guards and centipedes focus their attacks on characters who were knocked prone by the earthquake. The ettercap webspinner uses *webbed terrain* to fill the area around the heroes with webs, even if it means catching the centipede swarms in the burst.

As battle continues, the centipede swarms gang up on a single hero to increase the damage output of their *swarm aura*. The ettercap fang guards use *web tangle* to immobilize characters and increase the damage from their melee attacks. In the first rounds of combat, the fang guards try to flank adventurers in order to use their *spider bite* attack, switching to their greataxes after a successful bite.

The ettercap webspinner tries to keep the characters within the radius of its *webbed terrain* and in melee with the fang guards and centipedes. It attacks characters along the edges of the *webbed terrain* with its longspear and uses *web net* on any hero that attempts to close to melee range with it.

**2 Centipede Swarms** — **Level 2 Brute**
Medium natural beast — XP 125 each

**Initiative** +4 **Senses** Perception +1; darkvision
**Swarm Attack** aura 1; each enemy that starts its turn within the aura takes 3 damage plus 2 extra damage per centipede swarm adjacent to the enemy.
**HP** 44; **Bloodied** 22
**AC** 14; **Fortitude** 14; **Reflex** 15; **Will** 10
**Resist** half damage from melee and ranged attacks; **Vulnerable** 10 against close and area attacks
**Speed** 6 , Climb 6 (spider climb)
⊕ **Swarm of Mandibles** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Poison**
+4 vs. AC; 1d6 damage, and ongoing 5 poison damage (save ends); a creature already taking ongoing poison damage is also weakened (save ends). The centipede swarm's attack deals 1 extra damage for each centipede swarm adjacent to it.
**Survival Instinct** (immediate reaction, when hit by an area or close attack; at-will)
The centipede swarm shifts 3 squares.
**Alignment** Unaligned **Languages** –
**Skills** Stealth +9
**Str** 9 (+0) **Dex** 17 (+4) **Wis** 10 (+1)
**Con** 14 (+3) **Int** 1 (-4) **Cha** 6 (-1)

**2 Ettercap Fang Guards** — **Level 4 Soldier**
Medium natural humanoid — XP 175 each

**Initiative** +6 **Senses** Perception +3
**HP** 56; **Bloodied** 28
**AC** 20; **Fortitude** 17; **Reflex** 16; **Will** 15
**Resist** 10 poison
**Speed** 5, Climb 5 (spider climb)
⊕ **Greataxe** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
+9 vs. AC; 1d12 + 5 damage (crit 1d12 + 17).
⸸ **Spider Bite** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Poison**
Requires combat advantage; +9 vs. AC; 1d6 + 4 damage. If the attack hits, the ettercap makes a secondary attack against the same target.
*Secondary Attack:* +7 vs. Fortitude; the target is stunned until the end of the ettercap's next turn and takes ongoing 5 poison damage (save ends).
⸸ **Web Tangle** (standard; at-will)
+7 vs. Reflex; the target is immobilized (save ends).
**Web Reaper**
The ettercap fang guard gains a +2 bonus to attack rolls and deals an extra 2 damage against restrained or immobilized creatures.
**Web Walker**
An ettercap ignores movement effects of spider webs and difficult terrain related to spider swarms.
**Alignment** Unaligned **Languages** –
**Skills** Stealth +9
**Str** 16 (+5) **Dex** 14 (+4) **Wis** 13 (+3)
**Con** 16 (+5) **Int** 5 (-1) **Cha** 11 (+2)
**Equipment** leather armor, greataxe

| Ettercap Webspinner | Level 5 Controller |
|---|---|
| Medium natural humanoid | XP 200 |
| **Initiative** +4 **Senses** Perception +9 | |
| **HP** 64; **Bloodied** 32 | |
| **AC** 18; **Fortitude** 17; **Reflex** 16; **Will** 16 | |
| **Resist** 10 poison | |
| **Speed** 5 , Climb 5 (spider climb) | |
| **Longspear** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon** | |
| Reach 2; +10 vs. AC; 1d10 + 3 damage | |
| **Spider Bite** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Poison** | |
| Requires combat advantage; +10 vs. AC; 1d6 + 3 damage, and the ettercap makes a secondary attack against the same target. *Secondary Attack:* +8 vs. Fortitude; ongoing 5 poison damage (save ends). | |
| **Web Net** (minor 1/round; at-will) | |
| Ranged 5; +9 vs. Reflex; the target is restrained (save ends). | |
| **Webbed Terrain** (standard; recharge ⚅) | |
| Area burst 2 within 10; +9 vs. Reflex; the target is immobilized (save ends). The zone is filled with spider webs and is considered difficult terrain until the end of the encounter. | |
| **Web Walker** | |
| An ettercap ignores movement effects of spider webs and difficult terrain related to spider swarms. | |
| **Alignment** Unaligned **Languages** – | |
| **Skills** Stealth +9 | |
| **Str** 16 (+5) **Dex** 14 (+4) **Wis** 15 (+4) | |
| **Con** 16 (+5) **Int** 5 (-1) **Cha** 13 (+3) | |
| **Equipment** leather armor, longspear | |

## Developments

**When the adventurers approach the crevasse, read:**

*The ground has split open, revealing a deep chasm that descends into darkness. A faint glimmer of light is visible at the bottom, but it is impossible to gauge the distance from the light to where you stand at the top of the rift. The walls of the chasm are jagged with protruding stones and the gnarled roots of trees; certainly enough handholds to make for a fairly easy climb.*

The chasm drops 30 feet to the floor of the temple ruins below. It is fairly easy to climb, requiring only a DC 10 Athletics check; there is, however, a 10-foot drop from the rectory's ceiling to the floor, so heroes with no training in Acrobatics need to lower a rope or take 1d10 damage from the fall.

## Features of the Area

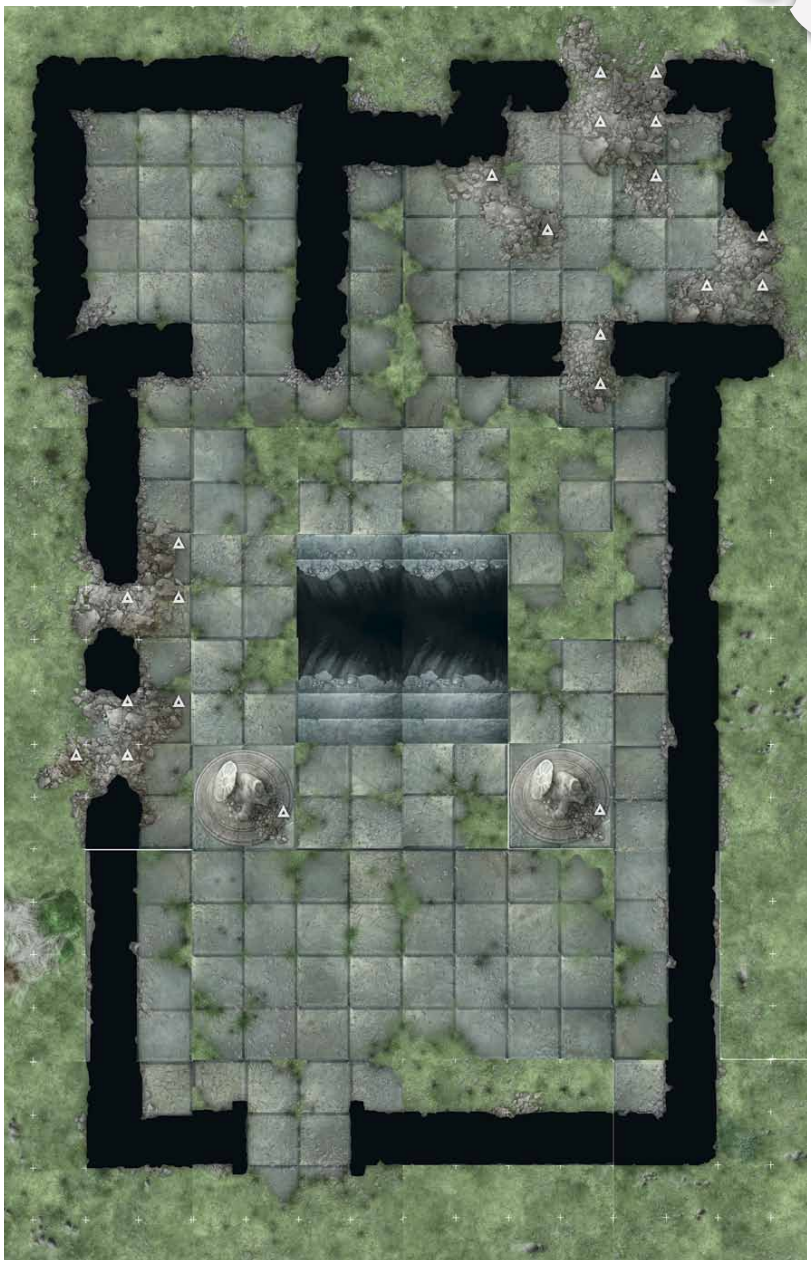
**Illumination:** Daylight

**Chasm:** The chasm plunges 30 feet down to the floor of the rectory. The walls can be climbed with a DC 10 Athletics check.

**Rubble:** The rubble in this area is difficult terrain.

**Statues:** The statues are blocking terrain and provide cover to adjacent creatures.

**Walls:** The walls range from 5 to 8 feet in height. They can be climbed with a DC 10 Athletics check. The tops of the walls are narrow and crumbling; characters moving atop the walls must succeed at a DC 10 Acrobatics check; the character falls prone atop the wall with a result of 6-9, or falls to the ground with a result of 5 or less.



## 2: Ancient Rectory

**Encounter Level 4 (XP 900)**

### Setup

**2 duergar scouts (S)**
**2 ettercap fang guards (F)**
**Covered spiked pit trap**

The two piles of rubble mark where the characters land if they drop straight down from the chasm opening. They might be concerned about landing in the loose stone, but it presents no danger (it is difficult terrain). The danger here comes from the ettercaps and duergar waiting to attack.

**When the first character reaches the bottom of the chasm (but hasn't yet dropped into the room), read:**

*The chasm ends in the ceiling of a large, brightly lit room. Directly beneath you is a pile of stones and debris that must have tumbled down when the chasm opened.*

**When the first character drops into the room, read:**

*The room appears to be an ancient rectory filled with decrepit furniture, including rickety tables and chairs and a trio of beds covered with rotting blankets. A moth-eaten rug lies in the middle of the floor. Two braziers at the northern end of the room are lit and provide ample illumination. Between them stand four monstrous humanoids; two are the same as the insectlike horrors you fought above, and the other two resemble fiendish dwarves with bristly beards and glowing red eyes. That's all you see before one of the dwarves kicks over a brazier and they all attack!*

### Tactics

The duergar and ettercaps aren't going to hold back until all the characters have gathered in the room. Ask for initiative rolls as soon as the first character drops in. Then the fight begins with the two duergar scouts acting immediately (they had prepared actions). The duergar on the eastern side of the room kicks over the brazier (a standard action), dousing it. The other duergar launches a crossbow bolt at the lone character in the room. Follow the normal initiative order from there. The other characters need to get down the chasm as quickly as possible.

With half the room in shadow, the duergar scouts both use *underdark sneak* whenever possible. The ettercaps do not charge into battle immediately; instead they try to draw the heroes across the room and into the spiked pit trap beneath the rug. If the adventurers discover the pit trap or seem disinclined to engage the ettercaps in melee, then the ettercaps charge into melee. They rely on their greataxes until the invisible duergar join the fight, at which time they maneuver to gain combat advantage on a character in order to use *spider bite*. If a character ventures near the edge of the trap, an ettercap will try to bull rush him into the pit.

The duergar prefer to snipe at heroes with their crossbows while invisible and save their *infernal quills* to hamper the attacks of enemies with powerful melee attacks. The scouts use *underdark sneak* as often as they are able, sticking to the shadows and staying close to a table or a bed. If forced into melee, the duergar switch to their warhammers and double-team injured characters.

### Development

An ettercap vermin handler is stationed in the hallway beyond the ironbound doors (see tactical encounter 3 for details). It is reasonably alert (Perception +9) but not especially inquisitive. Make a Perception check (DC 20) for this ettercap at the start of each combat round, beginning with round 2. If the check succeeds three times, the ettercap finally grows curious and comes to investigate the noises from this room, which draws the creatures from area 3 into this fight.

Once the fight ends, characters can examine the room.

The short hallway leading to the ironbound doors is flanked by a pair of altars. Even a rudimentary examination shows that they were once dedicated to Moradin but have been grotesquely defaced. Moradin's noble features have been replaced with a repulsive, insectoid visage that includes antennae and sharp mandibles. Extra, multi-jointed limbs have been crudely grafted to the deity's torso. Because Chitteruk exists only in the mind of Hargash, Religion checks made to determine the identity of the insectoid deity reveal no information.

The ironbound doors are thick and heavy but unlocked.

**2 Ettercap Fang Guards (F)** **Level 4 Soldier**
Medium natural humanoid XP 175 each

**Initiative** +6 **Senses** Perception +3
**HP** 56; **Bloodied** 28
**AC** 20; **Fortitude** 17; **Reflex** 16; **Will** 15
**Resist** 10 poison
**Speed** 5 , Climb 5 (spider climb)

⊕ **Greataxe** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
+9 vs. AC; 1d12 + 5 damage (crit 1d12 + 17).

**Spider Bite** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Poison**
Requires combat advantage; +9 vs. AC; 1d6 + 4 damage. If the attack hits, the ettercap makes a secondary attack against the same target.
*Secondary Attack:* +7 vs. Fortitude; the target is stunned until the end of the ettercap's next turn and takes ongoing 5 poison damage (save ends).

**Web Tangle** (standard; at-will)
+7 vs. Reflex; the target is immobilized (save ends).

**Web Reaper**
The ettercap fang guard gains a +2 bonus to attack rolls and deals an extra 2 damage against restrained or immobilized creatures.

**Web Walker**
An ettercap ignores movement effects of spider webs and difficult terrain related to spider swarms.

**Alignment** Unaligned **Languages** –
**Skills** Stealth +9
**Str** 16 (+5) **Dex** 14 (+4) **Wis** 13 (+3)
**Con** 16 (+5) **Int** 5 (-1) **Cha** 11 (+2)
**Equipment** leather armor, greataxe

**2 Duergar Scouts (S)** **Level 4 Lurker**
Medium natural humanoid XP 175 each

**Initiative** +8 **Senses** Perception +9; darkvision
**HP** 48; **Bloodied** 24
**AC** 18; **Fortitude** 18; **Reflex** 16; **Will** 16
**Immune** illusion; **Resist** 5 fire, 5 poison
**Speed** 5

⊕ **Warhammer** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
+8 vs. AC; 1d10 + 2 damage.

**Crossbow** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
Ranged 15/30; +9 vs. AC; 1d8 + 4 damage.

**Infernal Quills** (minor; encounter) ✦ **Poison**
Ranged 3; +9 vs. AC; 1d8 + 3 damage, and the target takes ongoing 2 poison damage and a -2 penalty to attack rolls (save ends both).

**Shadow Attack**
A duergar scout's attacks deal 2d6 extra damage while the scout is invisible.

**Underdark Sneak** (minor; while in dim light or darkness and adjacent to an object or a wall that occupies at least 1 square; at-will)
The duergar scout becomes invisible until the end of its next turn or until after it hits or misses with an attack.

**Alignment** Evil **Languages** Common, Deep Speech, Dwarven
**Skills** Dungeoneering +9, Stealth +9
**Str** 15 (+4) **Dex** 17 (+5) **Wis** 14 (+4)
**Con** 18 (+6) **Int** 10 (+2) **Cha** 7 (+0)
**Equipment** chainmail, warhammer, crossbow, crossbow bolt x10

**Covered Spiked Pit Trap** **Level 1 Elite Warder**
**Trap** **XP 200**

**Trap**: A moth-eaten rug covers a 10-foot-deep pit. Jagged spikes coated with poison have been placed at the bottom of the pit.

**Perception**
**DC 17:** The character notices that the center of the rug droops, as if there is a hollow space beneath it.

**Trigger**
The trap attacks when a creature enters any of the 8 squares occupied by the rug.

**Attack**
**Immediate Reaction** **Melee**
**Attack:** +6 vs. Reflex
**Hit:** Target falls into the pit, takes 2d10 damage and ongoing 5 poison damage (save ends), and falls prone.
**Miss:** Target returns to the last square it occupied and its move action ends immediately.
**Effect:** The rug falls into the pit and it is no longer hidden.

**Countermeasures**
- ✦ An adjacent character can push the rug into the pit (standard action) so it is no longer hidden.
- ✦ A character can jump over the pit.
- ✦ A character can climb out of the pit with a DC 10 Athletics check.

## Features of the Area

**Illumination:** Bright within 5 squares of the western brazier (which burns as a torch); dim everywhere else, from light filtering down through the chasm. Dim illumination provides concealment against characters and creatures that don't have low-light vision, darkvision, or some other sense.

**Ceiling:** The ceiling is 10 feet high.

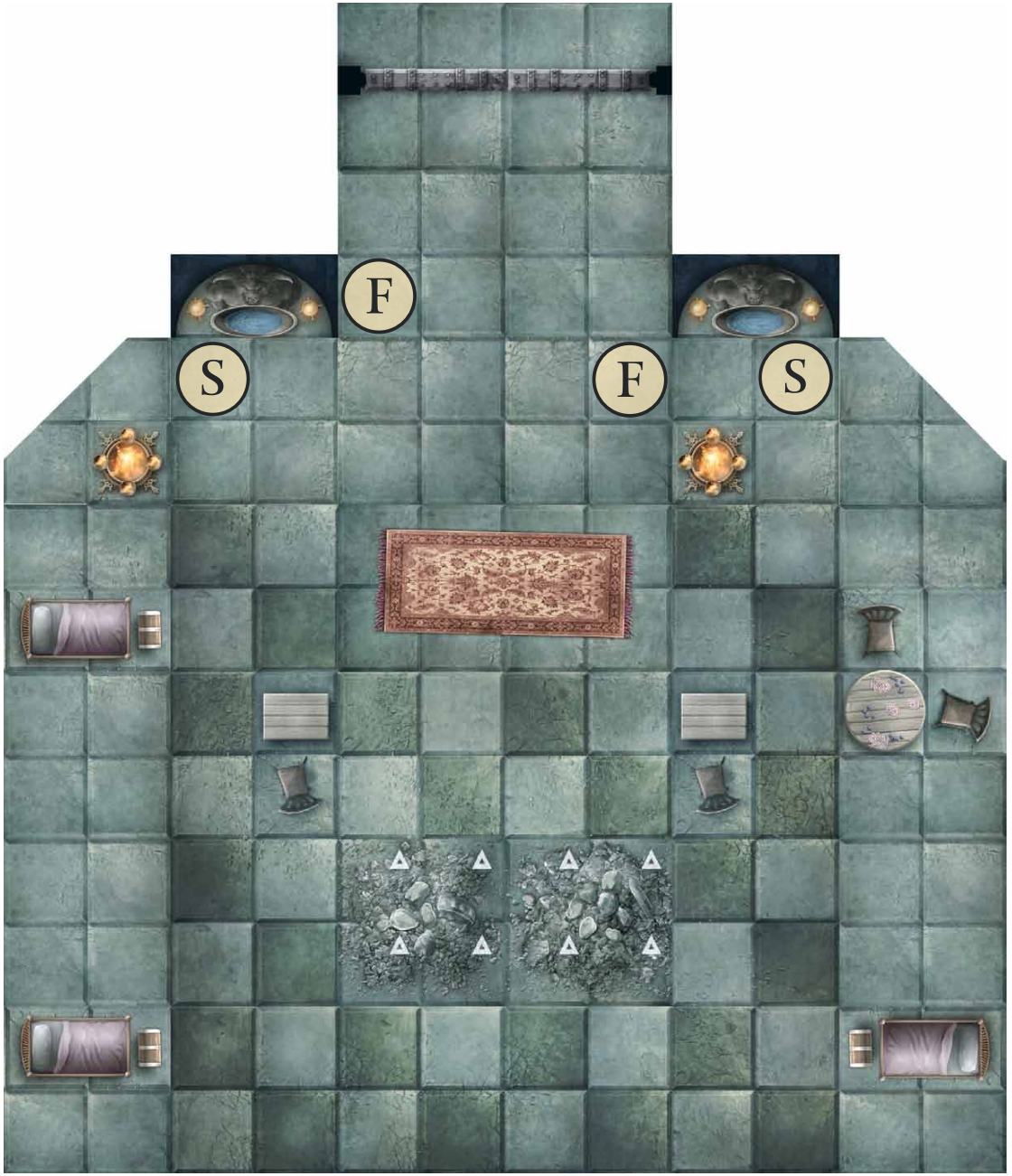
**Beds, Tables, and Chairs:** The furniture is difficult terrain and provides cover. If a creature of Medium size or larger jumps onto a bed, table, or chair, it collapses and the creature must make an immediate Acrobatics check (DC 10) to avoid falling prone.

**Braziers:** The eastern brazier is dumped over and extinguished at the beginning of the encounter. If the remaining brazier is toppled (standard action), then the whole room is left in dim illumination.

**Doors:** The ironbound doors at the northern end of the room are not locked.

**Footlockers:** The ancient footlockers are still in good shape and their locks are sturdy. They can be opened with a DC 15 Thievery check. One of the footlockers contains the treasure parcel for this area.

**Rubble:** The rubble is difficult terrain.



# 3: The Hall of Honored Dead

**Encounter Level 4 (XP 825)**

## Setup

**2 deathjump spiders** (S)
**1 ettercap vermin handler** (E)
**3 fire beetles** (B)

If the ettercap vermin handler didn't respond to the battle in area 2, it is not expecting trouble now. Opening the ancient doors to this room makes an awful, screeching racket, however, so the adventurers can't surprise the ettercap.

The ettercap and three fire beetles in the northern end of the room are making no effort to hide. The deathjump spiders are clinging to the ceiling, one above each of the large statues. With their passive Stealth score of 21, there is a good chance they go unnoticed and gain combat advantage against the characters when battle begins.

**When the characters enter this room, read:**

*A large pool on a stone dais sits in the center of this room. Soft blue light spilling out of the pool fills the room with a dim radiance. The first things you see in that dim light are four sarcophagi arranged in a square around the pool. Three have been smashed open, but the fourth appears intact. Before you can take in anything else, movement at the far end of the room catches your eye, and you spot another of the insectlike humanoids. This one grips a metal rod and is surrounded by a trio of beetles, each the size of a large dog. The beetles' abdomens glow a cherry red, and you can feel heat from their bodies from across the room.*

**2 Deathjump Spiders (S)** **Medium natural beast**
Level 4 Skirmisher XP 175 each

**Initiative** +8 **Senses** Perception +9; tremorsense
**HP** 55; **Bloodied** 27
**AC** 20; **Fortitude** 17; **Reflex** 18; **Will** 16
**Resist** 5 poison
**Speed** 6 , Climb 6 (spider climb)

**Bite** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Poison**
+6 vs. AC; 2d6 + 3 damage, and the target takes ongoing 5 poison damage and is slowed (save ends both).

**Death from Above** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Poison**
The deathjump spider leaps at its prey, shifting 6 squares and making a bite attack. On a hit, it deals an extra 1d6 damage and also knocks the target prone.

**Prodigious Leap** (move; encounter)
The deathjump spider shifts 10 squares.

**Soft Fall**
The deathjump spider ignores the first 30 feet when determining damage from a fall.

**Alignment** Unaligned **Languages** –
**Skills** Athletics +10, Stealth +11
**Str** 17 (+5) **Dex** 18 (+6) **Wis** 14 (+4)
**Con** 15 (+4) **Int** 1 (-3) **Cha** 8 (+1)

**3 Fire Beetles (B)** **Small natural beast**
Level 1 Brute XP 100 each

**Initiative** +1 **Senses** Perception +0
**HP** 32; **Bloodied** 16
**AC** 13; **Fortitude** 13; **Reflex** 12; **Will** 11
**Resist** 10 fire
**Speed** 6

**Bite** (standard; at-will)
+5 vs. AC; 2d4 + 2 damage.

**Fire Spray** (standard; recharge ⚄ ⚅) ✦ **Fire**
Close blast 3; +4 vs. Reflex; 3d6 fire damage.

**Alignment** Unaligned **Languages** –
**Str** 14 (+2) **Dex** 12 (+1) **Wis** 10 (+0)
**Con** 12 (+1) **Int** 1 (-5) **Cha** 8 (-1)

**Ettercap Vermin Handler (E)** **Medium natural humanoid**
Level 4 Controller (Leader) XP 175

**Initiative** +4 **Senses** Perception +9
**HP** 56; **Bloodied** 28
**AC** 17; **Fortitude** 15; **Reflex** 14; **Will** 16
**Resist** 10 poison
**Speed** 5, Climb 5 (spider climb)

**Venom Goad** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon, Poison**
+9 vs. AC; 1d8 + 3 damage, and ongoing 5 poison damage (save ends).

**Spider Bite** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Poison**
Requires combat advantage; +9 vs. AC; 1d6 + 3 damage, and the ettercap makes a secondary attack against the same target.
*Secondary Attack:* +7 vs. Fortitude; ongoing 5 poison damage (save ends).

**Web Net** (minor 1/round; at-will)
Ranged 5; +8 vs. Reflex; the target is restrained (save ends).

**Verminous Urging** (minor; recharge ⚄ ⚅ ⚅)
An adjacent allied natural beast with an Intelligence score of 1 or any creature with the spider keyword gains one of the following benefits:
✦ The target natural beast gains a +4 bonus to damage rolls until the end of its next turn.
✦ One of the target natural beast's rechargeable powers recharges and the target uses it immediately.
✦ The next successful melee attack made by the target natural beast inflicts ongoing 5 poison damage (save ends).

**Web Walker**
An ettercap ignores movement effects of spider webs and difficult terrain related to spider swarms.

**Alignment** Unaligned **Languages** –
**Skills** Stealth +9, Nature +9
**Str** 16 (+5) **Dex** 14 (+4) **Wis** 15 (+4)
**Con** 16 (+5) **Int** 6 (+0) **Cha** 18 (+6)
**Equipment** leather armor, goad

## Tactics

When combat begins, the death jump spiders use *death from above* against heroes who failed to detect them, gaining combat advantage for the attack. The fire beetles move forward and unleash their *fire blasts* on the characters; they aren't particularly careful and may catch the deathjump spiders in the blast. The ettercap vermin handler delays its action until the fire beetles have attacked. It then moves up, making sure to move adjacent to one of the fire beetles, and uses *web net* on the nearest adventurer. It then uses a minor action for *verminous urging* and goads one of the fire beetles into using its *fire spray* attack as an immediate action.

As the battle continues, the death jump spiders attack characters with their *bite* attacks until bloodied, at which time they use *prodigious leap* to leap straight up and cling to the ceiling. From the ceiling, they reenter the fray with another use of *death from above*. The fire beetles attack the characters in melee with bite attacks and use *fire spray* as often as it recharges. They are fairly indiscriminate with their targeting and may catch allies within the blast. The ettercap vermin handler attacks the heroes in melee with *venom goad* and *spider bite*. It remains adjacent to a fire beetle or deathjump spider so it can use *verminous urging* when the power recharges.

## Development

When the adventurers take the time to explore this room, describe its features fully.

The pool is a type of scrying device. It only shows images of the lives of the dwarven heroes interred here. A character making a DC 15 Arcana or Religion check while studying the pool can learn how to activate its magic. All that's required is dipping a finger into the pool and speaking aloud the name of one of the dwarves buried here. The names of the heroes laid to rest in this room were inscribed on their sarcophagus lids, but sadly, three of them were destroyed by Hargash and his minions. Only one remains

Any character who speaks dwarven can read the name "Ivak Stoneblood" inscribed into the lid of the intact sarcophagus. If Ivak's name is used to activate the pool, it shows the following scenes:

*A dwarven warrior in battered, scarred armor battles a group of duergar in the lightless reaches of the Underdark. He wields a mighty hammer with devastating skill. Each time its anvil-shaped head strikes a foe, it releases a flash of brilliant blue light and the duergar falls dead.*

*The image fades and is replaced with a somber scene of dwarven priests interring the hammer-wielding warrior in a carved stone sarcophagus. The warrior is laid to rest with great reverence, and his hammer is laid across his chest before the lid of the sarcophagus is sealed in place.*

The crypt seen in the pool is obviously the same room where the characters stand.

A DC 15 History check reveals a little more about Ivak Stoneblood. He was famous for battling the duergar, and his hammer was reputed to be blessed by Moradin himself.

If the heroes decide to open Ivak's sarcophagus, it is not as easy as simply tipping off the lid. After keeping Hargash from violating the dwarven hero's tomb, Moradin is not about to let a group of untested adventurers claim the hammer, whatever their intentions. If they wish to open the sarcophagus, characters must prove their worth to Moradin in some fashion. Until they do so, the sarcophagus can't be opened; the power of Moradin prevents it.

Happily, a DC 15 Religion or Insight check reveals at least two ways the adventurers can prove their good intentions.

- The characters can rededicate one of the altars in the rectory to Moradin. This requires one use of the holy water found in the two fonts in this room and a complexity 1 skill challenge (Religion only, DC 13, 4 successes before 3 failures).
- The characters can restore one of the statues in the Hall of Honored Dead to its former condition. This requires a complexity 1 skill challenge (Dungeoneering only, DC 13, 4 successes before 3 failures).

If the heroes complete either or both of the skill challenges, they can then open the sarcophagus of Ivak Stoneblood.

**When the characters open the sarcophagus of Ivak Stoneblood, read:**

*The heavy lid of the sarcophagus slides away with a gentle push, revealing the body of a dwarven warrior dressed in crumbling, rust-pitted chainmail. Despite the decrepit state of the corpse's armor and clothing, the stout warhammer lying across its skeletal chest looks as new as the day it was forged. The hammer's head is shaped like an anvil and the steel gleams with a bluish tint.*

The Hammer of Ivak Stoneblood is a +2 devilblind warhammer.

**Devilblind Weapon** **Level 5+**

*This weapon gleams with holy energy that devils find intensely painful.*

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Lvl 7 | +2 | 2,600 gp | Lvl 22 | +5 | 325,000 gp |
| Lvl 12 | +3 | 13,000 gp | Lvl 27 | +6 | 1,625,000 gp |
| Lvl 17 | +4 | 65,000 gp | | | |

**Weapon:** Any

**Enhancement:** Attack rolls and damage rolls

**Critical:** +1d6 radiant damage per plus, +1d8 radiant damage per plus against devils.

**Property:** You gain a bonus to saving throws against the attacks of devils equal to the enhancement bonus of the weapon.

**Power (Daily ✦ Radiant):** Free Action: Use this power when you hit a devil with the weapon. The target takes an extra 1d8 radiant damage and is blinded (save ends).

*Level 12 or 17:* 2d8 radiant damage, and the target is blinded (save ends).

*Level 22 or 27:* 3d8 radiant damage, and the target is blinded (save ends, with a -2 penalty to the saving throw).

## Features of the Area

**Illumination:** The pool provides dim illumination to the entire room.

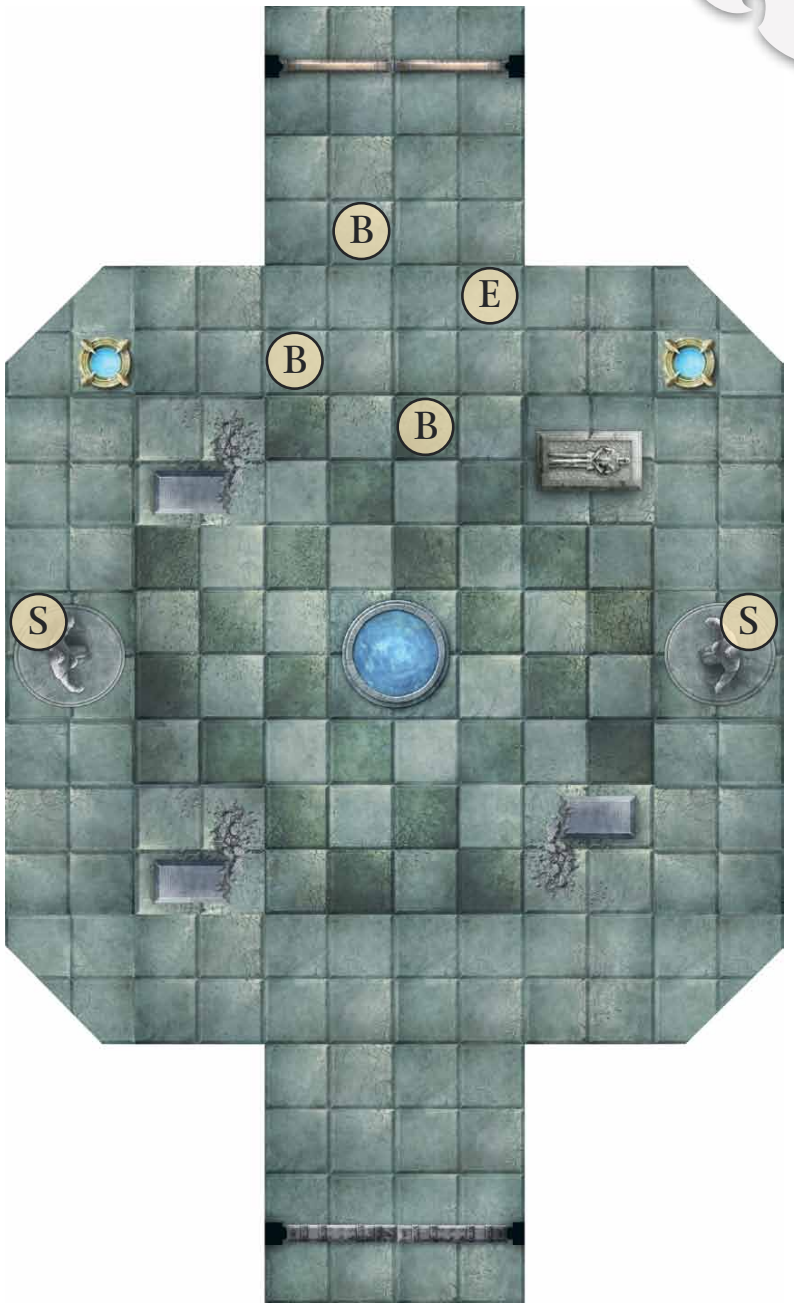
**Ceiling:** The ceiling is 20 feet high.

**Holy Water Fonts:** Two holy water fonts are mounted on short stone pillars in the northeast and northwest corners of the room. The power of Moradin is still strong enough in this area to prevent Hargash from turning the holy water into unholy water. A DC 15 Arcana or Religion check when examining the fonts reveals that each contains a single use of level 1 holy water. This holy water has the unique property that it is effective against duergar; it inflicts damage on the tainted dwarves as if they were demons or undead.

**Pool:** The dais the pool is mounted on is 4 feet high. It and the pool provide cover. The water in the pool is normal; the glow comes from the pool itself, which is enchanted in a manner similar to the Dark Light ritual.

**Sarcophagi:** The smashed sarcophagi are difficult terrain. The intact sarcophagus is 4 feet high. All provide cover. A character can jump on top of the intact sarcophagus with a DC 15 Athletics check. The three opened sarcophagi contain yellowed bones and tattered vestments in disarray. The fourth, unopened sarcophagus has the carved image of a resplendent dwarf warrior on its lid.

**Statues:** The statues are blocking terrain and provide cover to adjacent creatures. Each is 10 feet tall. They once depicted dwarf warriors, but they have been remade to resemble great insectlike humanoids, with mandibles, multifaceted eyes, and many multi-jointed limbs.



# 4: The Profaned Chapel

**Encounter Level 5 (XP 1,025)**

## Setup

**1 deathjump spider** (D)
**1 duergar shock trooper** (T)
**Hargash Bitterblade** (H)
**2 stormclaw scorpions** (S)

Hargash's loud, monotonous chanting makes it difficult for his minions to hear the approach of intruders, and Hargash himself is completely tuned out of his surroundings. If the characters are careful, they can enter the chapel unnoticed and gain a surprise round. If they try to enter with Stealth, the shock trooper and vermin suffer a -5 penalty to their passive Perception thanks to Hargash's chanting. Hargash won't hear anything until someone attacks.

**When the characters enter this room, read:**

*This cavernous chapel is dominated by a towering statue originally crafted as a representation of the dwarven deity Moradin. It has been crudely transformed into an image of the bizarre insect deity you've seen throughout the temple. Smaller statues of dwarven gods and heroes, similarly disfigured, stand against the walls. Four basins on raised platforms stand in the four corners of the chapel. A rubble-choked passage leads away to the north.*

*Kneeling before the great statue of the insect god is a stout duergar in green robes. He is flanked by pair of scorpions the size of wolves, and a monstrous spider clings to the towering statue above him. Another duergar arrayed in chainmail and armed with a maul stands protectively at his back. The kneeling duergar is praying loudly in grotesque utterances of some unholy language.*

**Hargash Bitterblade, Level 5 Elite Controller (Leader)**
**Chosen of Chitteruk (H)**
Medium natural humanoid XP 400

**Initiative** +2 **Senses** Perception +11; darkvision
**Shroud of Chitteruk** aura 5; Natural beasts with an Intelligence score of 1 or any creature with the spider keyword within the aura gain a +2 bonus to attack rolls and saving throws.
**HP** 126; **Bloodied** 63
**AC** 19; **Fortitude** 16; **Reflex** 16; **Will** 18
**Immune** illusion; **Resist** 5 fire, 5 poison
**Saving Throws** +2
**Speed** 5
**Action Points** 1

**Envenomed War Pick** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Poison, Weapon**
+10 vs. AC; 1d8 + 3 damage, and Hargash makes a secondary attack against the same target.
*Secondary Attack:* +9 vs. Fortitude; ongoing 5 poison damage and the target is weakened (save ends both).

**Web Bolt** (standard; at-will)
Ranged 10; +9 vs. Reflex; 1d8 + 4 damage and the target is slowed (save ends). *First Failed Save:* The target is immobilized (save ends).

**Infernal Quills** (minor; encounter) ✦ **Poison**
Ranged 3; +10 vs. AC; 1d8 + 3 damage, and the target takes ongoing 2 poison damage and a -2 penalty to attack rolls (save ends both).

**Curse of Chitteruk** (standard; recharge ⚄ ⚅) ✦ **Poison**
Ranged 10; +9 vs. Reflex; 3d6 + 4 poison damage and ongoing 5 poison damage (save ends). If the target is already suffering ongoing poison damage, the ongoing poison damage increases by 5 and saving throws made to end the ongoing poison damage take a -2 penalty. *Curse of Chitteruk* can increase the ongoing poison damage taken by a target only once, even if the target is struck multiple times by *Curse of Chitteruk*.

**Verminous Blast** (standard; encounter) ✦ **Poison**
Area burst 2 within 15; +9 vs. Fortitude; 2d6 + 4 poison damage, and one centipede swarm appears in any unoccupied space within the burst. The centipede swarm treats Hargash as an ally and takes its turn on his initiative. The centipede swarm remains until the end of the encounter.

**Alignment** Evil **Languages** Common, Deep Speech, Dwarven
**Skills** Dungeoneering +13, Arcana +7, Religion +7, Nature +11
**Str** 15 (+4) **Dex** 12 (+3) **Wis** 18 (+6)
**Con** 16 (+5) **Int** 15 (+4) **Cha** 16 (+5)
**Equipment** war pick

**If Hargash becomes aware of the characters before they attack, read:**

*The chanting stops suddenly, and the kneeling duergar leaps to his feet and turns toward you. His gaunt face is twisted in a rictus of hatred and madness. He raises a twitching finger, points at you, and shouts in Common, "Slay them in the name of Chitteruk!"*

## Tactics

In the first round of combat, Hargash uses *verminous blast* to create another insect ally and injure as many heroes as possible. The stormclaw scorpions and the duergar shock trooper advance to engage the characters in melee. The shock trooper uses its *beard quills* before closing. The deathjump spider closes with its chosen target with a combination of *prodigious leap* and *death from above*.

In the following rounds of combat, Hargash moves just out of melee range to ensure his verminous minions can benefit from *aura of Chitteruk*. He targets melee-oriented adventurers with *web bolt* to hamper their movement and uses *curse of Chitteruk* as often as possible on heroes suffering ongoing poison damage. Hargash does not shrink from melee, although he uses *beard quills* before entering close combat with his *envenomed war pick*.

The duergar shock trooper targets characters in combat with the scorpions, spider, or centipede swarm, attempting to flank characters to increase its chances of hitting with its maul. When bloodied, it uses *expand* and then moves adjacent to Hargash, using its reach to protect its master.

The stormclaw scorpions and centipede swarm attack the closest heroes in melee, relentlessly biting and stinging until slain. The deathjump spider leaps about the chapel, targeting random adventurers with *death from above* as often as possible.

When Hargash is bloodied, he and his remaining minions retreat to the pools in the northern end of the room to make use their healing powers. Hargash makes his last stand there, fighting to the death to protect the temple of his imaginary god.

**Duergar Shock Trooper (T)** **Level 6 Brute**
**Medium natural humanoid** **XP 250**

**Initiative** +6 **Senses** Perception +7; darkvision
**HP** 84; **Bloodied** 42
**AC** 18; **Fortitude** 19; **Reflex** 18; **Will** 18
**Immune** illusion; **Resist** 5 fire, 5 poison
**Speed** 5

⊕ **Maul** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
+9 vs. AC; 2d6 + 6 damage.

↷ **Infernal Quills** (minor; encounter) ✦ **Poison**
Ranged 3; +9 vs. AC; 1d8 + 4 damage, and the target takes ongoing 2 poison damage and a -2 penalty to attack rolls (save ends both).

**Expand** (when first bloodied; encounter) ✦ **Polymorph**
The duergar shock trooper becomes Large, occupying 4 squares instead of 1. Any creatures in the squares that the shock trooper comes to occupy are pushed 1 square. The shock trooper also gains reach 2 and a +5 bonus to its melee damage rolls. The shock trooper remains Large until the end of the encounter.

**Alignment** Evil **Languages** Common, Deep Speech, Dwarven
**Skills** Dungeoneering +12
**Str** 19 (+7) **Dex** 16 (+6) **Wis** 16 (+6)
**Con** 14 (+5) **Int** 10 (+3) **Cha** 8 (+2)
**Equipment** chainmail, maul

**2 Stormclaw Scorpions (S)** **Level 1 Soldier**
**Medium natural beast** **XP 100 each**

**Initiative** +3 **Senses** Perception +0; tremorsense
**HP** 32; **Bloodied** 16
**AC** 16; **Fortitude** 14; **Reflex** 12; **Will** 11
**Resist** 10 lightning
**Speed** 6

⊕ **Claws** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Lightning**
+8 vs. AC; 1d6 + 3 damage, and a Medium or smaller target is grabbed (until escape). A grabbed target takes 5 lightning damage at the start of the stormclaw scorpion's turn.

⸸ **Sting** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Poison**
+6 vs. Fortitude; 1d4 + 3 damage, and the target takes ongoing 5 poison damage and is immobilized (save ends both). The stormclaw scorpion can use this attack against a target it has grabbed.

⸸ **Reactive Sting** (immediate interrupt, when an enemy grabbed by the scorpion escapes; at-will)
The stormclaw scorpion makes a *sting* attack against the enemy.

**Alignment** Unaligned **Languages** –
**Str** 16 (+3) **Dex** 12 (+1) **Wis** 11 (+0)
**Con** 12 (+1) **Int** 1 (-5) **Cha** 10 (+0)

**Deathjump Spider (D)** **Level 4 Skirmisher**
**Medium natural beast** **XP 175**

**Initiative** +8 **Senses** Perception +9; tremorsense
**HP** 55; **Bloodied** 27
**AC** 20; **Fortitude** 17; **Reflex** 18; **Will** 16
**Resist** 5 poison
**Speed** 6 , Climb 6 (spider climb)

⊕ **Bite** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Poison**
+6 vs. AC; 2d6 + 3 damage, and the target takes ongoing 5 poison damage and is slowed (save ends both).

⸸ **Death from Above** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Poison**
The deathjump spider leaps at its prey, shifting 6 squares and making a *bite* attack. On a hit, it deals an extra 1d6 damage and also knocks the target prone.

**Prodigious Leap** (move; encounter)
The deathjump spider shifts 10 squares.

**Soft Fall**
The deathjump spider ignores the first 30 feet when determining damage from a fall.

**Alignment** Unaligned **Languages** –
**Skills** Athletics +10, Stealth +11
**Str** 17 (+5) **Dex** 18 (+6) **Wis** 14 (+4)
**Con** 15 (+4) **Int** 1 (-3) **Cha** 8 (+1)

**Centipede Swarm** **Level 2 Brute**
**Medium natural beast** **XP –**

**Initiative** +4 **Senses** Perception +1; darkvision
**Swarm Attack** aura 1; each enemy that starts its turn within the aura takes 3 damage plus 2 extra damage per centipede swarm adjacent to the enemy.
**HP** 44; **Bloodied** 22
**AC** 14; **Fortitude** 14; **Reflex** 15; **Will** 10
**Resist** half damage from melee and ranged attacks; **Vulnerable** 10 against close and area attacks
**Speed** 6 , Climb 6 (spider climb)

⊕ **Swarm of Mandibles** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Poison**
+4 vs. AC; 1d6 damage, and ongoing 5 poison damage (save ends); a creature already taking ongoing poison damage is also weakened (save ends). The centipede swarm's attack deals 1 extra damage for each centipede swarm adjacent to it

**Survival Instinct** (immediate reaction, when hit by an area or close attack; at-will)
The centipede swarm shifts 3 squares.

**Alignment** Unaligned **Languages** –
**Skills** Stealth +9
**Str** 9 (+0) **Dex** 17 (+4) **Wis** 10 (+1)
**Con** 14 (+3) **Int** 1 (-4) **Cha** 6 (-1)

## Features of the Area

**Illumination:** The four pools in this area glow with soft red and blue light, providing dim illumination to the entire chapel. Note that all of the foes except the stormclaw scorpions have darkvision.

**Ceiling:** The ceiling is 30 feet high.

**Columns:** The columns are blocking terrain.

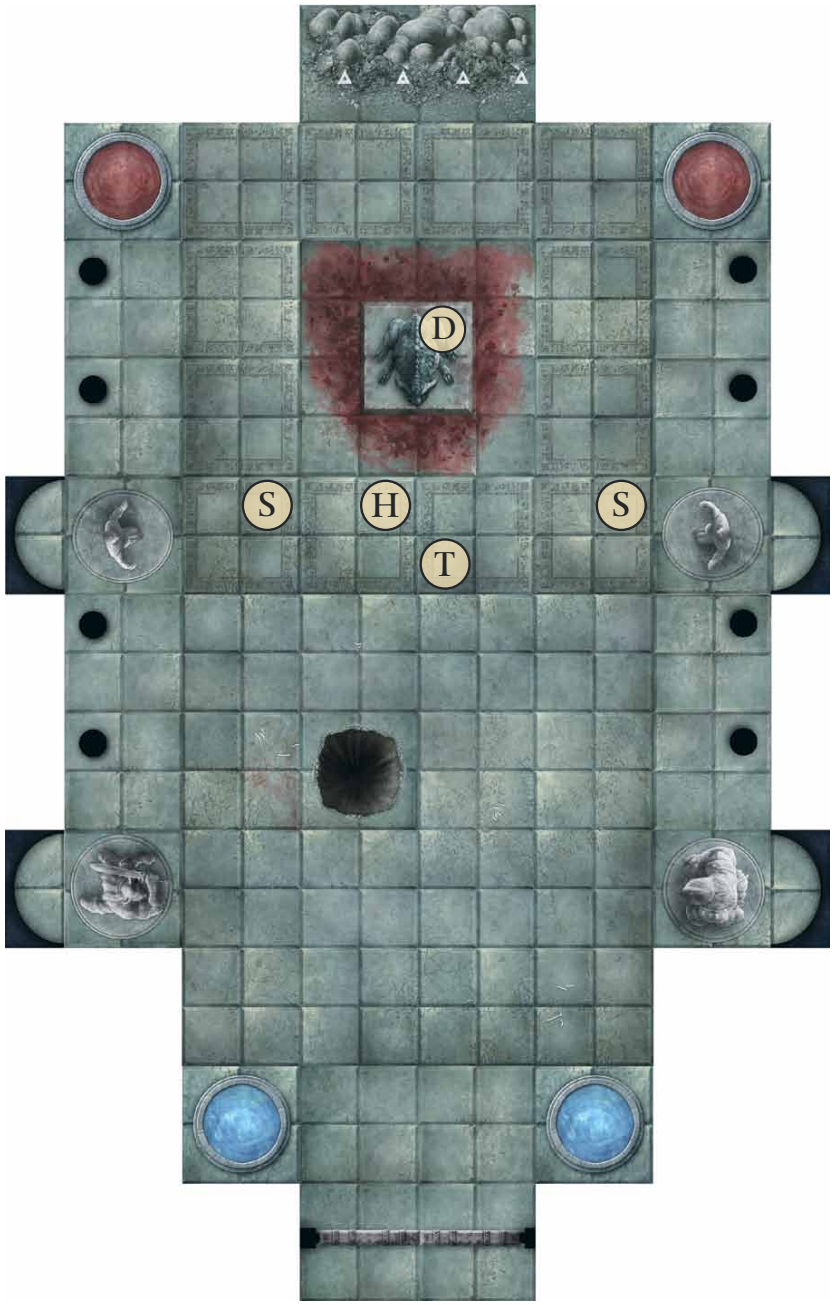
**Statue of Chitteruk:** The statue of Chitteruk exudes a palpable evil. Good creatures adjacent to it suffer a -1 penalty to saving throws.

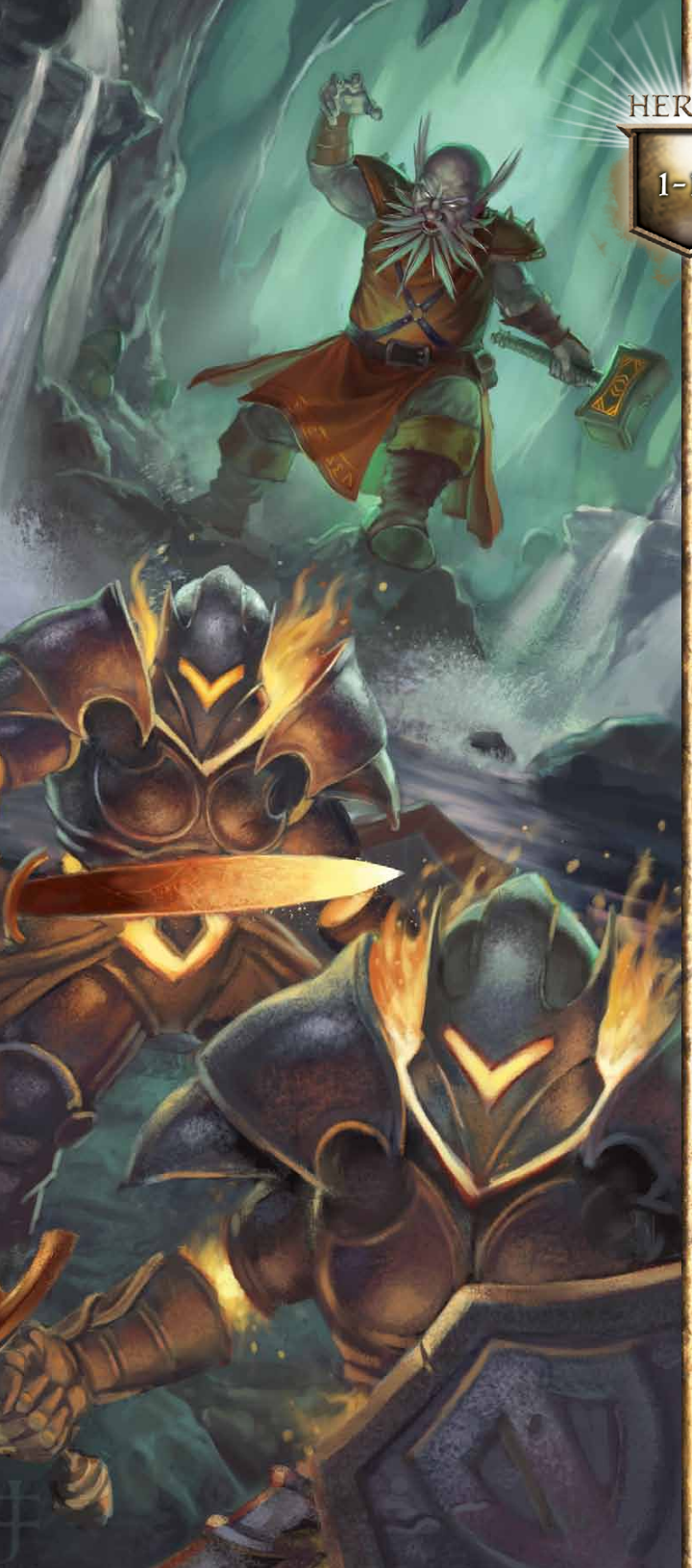
**Blue Pools:** The crystal-clear water in these pools is still blessed by Moradin. A character that drinks from one (a standard action) can immediately spend a healing surge and regain an additional 5 hit points. The water loses this property if removed from the temple.

**Red Pools:** The murky, red water in these pools has been cursed by the dread power of the great meteorite. If Hargash drinks from one of these pools (a standard action), he regains 31 hit points. If a character drinks from one of these pools, he or she suffers the following attack: +9 vs. Fortitude; 2d6+4 poison damage and ongoing 5 poison damage (save ends).

**Pit:** This shallow pit is only 5 feet deep. A creature the falls into it suffers no damage but falls prone. Climbing out of the pit requires a DC 5 Athletics check.

**Statues:** The statues are blocking terrain and provide cover to adjacent creatures.





HEROIC
1–10

# Coppernight's Salvation

*By Shawn Merwin*
*illustration by Jeff Himmelman*

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*Trapped beneath his fledgling mining operation, the dwarf Kavalar Coppernight and the few of his miners who survived an attack are running out of food and water. Their only hope is that the local town might send out a force looking for them. But the attack on Coppernight Hold was more than anyone imagined.*

A duergar theurge named Spraugh believes an enchanted pool is concealed beneath the mine owned and operated by Coppernight. Spraugh believes this pool holds infernal powers, which he hopes to use to enhance his power.

"Coppernight Hold" is the first delve in the D&D *Dungeon Delve* supplement. In it, the characters are asked by the mayor of a small town to investigate what happened at the site of a nearby mine operated by the dwarf Kavalar Coppernight. The dwarves, and then some militiamen sent from the town, failed to return.

The mining operation was attacked by a group of kobolds that were serving a wyrmling white dragon. At the end of that short adventure, the heroes vanquished the wyrmling dragon and her kobold servants. What lay beyond the closed iron doors of the audience chamber was left up to the DM to decide.

If you run this delve as a continuation of "Coppernight Hold," what awaits the characters deeper in Coppernight's mine are not merely kobolds. The kobolds were simply following the dragon, which was duped into the attack by Spraugh, a deranged duergar. The dragon was tricked by Spraugh into thinking the true value of the mine lay in its ore and other material wealth. In truth, Spraugh was willing to sacrifice all of the gold in the mine for a chance at greater power through the enchanted pool.

If "Coppernight's Salvation" is used as a sequel immediately after "Coppernight Hold," then the characters should be allowed an extended rest after they deal with the dragon wyrmling and her kobold helpers in the audience chamber. Alternatively, this adventure can be run on its own without "Coppernight Hold."

Spraugh led an assault on the Coppernight mine with the aid of several fellow duergar and some trained giant ants.

During the assault on his home and mine, Kavalar Coppernight lost many of his miners and all of his guards. He was able to set some traps and barricade his people deep within the mine. The situation is getting desperate, however, as food and water are running low.

## Synopsis

Heavy, double doors separate the audience chamber of Coppernight Hold from the mines. A Thievery check (DC 15) will open the lock. Beyond, duergar and other creatures in service to Spraugh have set up defenses against a possible counterattack. Defeating these duergar and their trained giant ants will reveal a follower of Coppernight named Hequern. The duergar were interrogating her, hoping to learn how to get into the area where Coppernight and his people are hiding.

Using the information provided by Coppernight's servant, the characters can engage in a skill challenge. Success allows the heroes to communicate with Coppernight in his sanctuary. This communication leads to advantages for the characters in the later battles.

Continuing onward into the mines, the characters come up against more duergar accompanied by infernal creatures under the sway of Spraugh. Finally, the characters arrive at the area where Spraugh is studying the magical waters and looking for a passage deeper into the mines. Here the PCs can defeat Spraugh and save Coppernight and his followers.

"Coppernight's Salvation" is a dungeon delve for five 1st-level characters. While this delve is intended to be played on its own, you can also run it as a continuation of the encounters detailed in "Coppernight Hold" from the *Dungeon Delve* supplement.

**Tiles:** The maps for this delve can be created using just one set of tiles—DU3, *Caves of Carnage*.

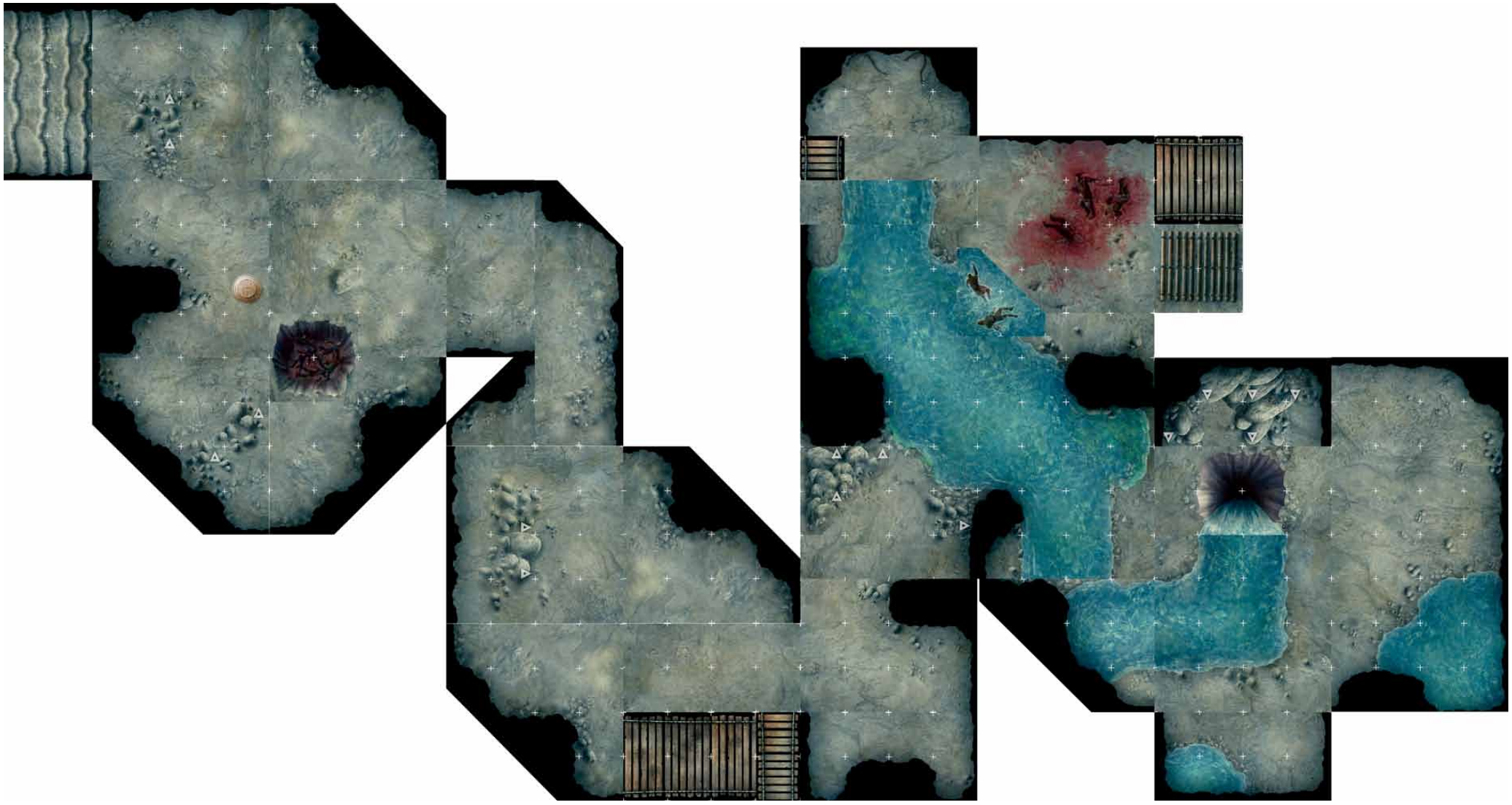
## Reward

If characters rescue Kavalar Coppernight and his workers, he rewards them with any three 1st-level treasure parcels of your choosing. Don't include more than one magical item (parcels 1-4).

## Further Adventures

If you use this delve as part of a larger campaign, you can add further threats between the characters and the survivors. For example, characters might find another series of chambers at the bottom of the waterfall in the final encounter. Perhaps Uxichyrath is merely a lieutenant in the small army of a duergar cleric of Asmodeus, and this cleric has summoned devils from the pool to do his bidding. Of course, more areas in the mine are still trapped by Coppernight's miners, and he may or may not be willing to assist the heroes in their fight.

Finally, the PCs might learn that the pool has the potential to spew forth countless devilish monsters. The only way to seal the pool/portal is to collapse the entire mine on top of it, probably while evil creatures are emerging from the pool and scrambling up the waterfall chute. Kavalar Coppernight almost certainly will oppose any action that will result in the destruction of his mine, even if the pool is an otherworldly portal.



# Encounter C1: Hequern's Rescue

**Encounter Level 3 (775 XP)**

**3 duergar guards** (G)
**2 hive warrior giant ants** (A)

## Setup

In this area, three duergar guards are torturing one of Coppernight's miners, a female dwarf named Hequern, in an effort to force her to reveal information. She is tied up in a pit full of water, and the duergar splash small amounts of acid into the pit to weaken her resolve. Two hive warrior ants trained by the duergar guard the room as well.

**As the characters open the doors into the chamber, read:**

*The iron doors open onto a rough-hewn chamber. Stone steps lead down to a rough floor. Three creatures, similar to dwarves but with spiky beards, stand around a grate in the floor, splashing liquid into it. Between you and the dwarves are two giant ants.*

Have all the characters make Stealth checks and compare them to the duergars' passive Perception of 14. If everyone scores 15 or higher, then the heroes gain a surprise round. (See "Passive Checks" on page 179 of the *Player's Handbook* for how to resolve the tie if characters score 14 exactly on this check.)

**If any character rolls less than 14 (or loses a tie), read the following aloud:**

*One dwarf looks right at you and says, "Finally, some action. I say we take one alive to put in the pit." In the distance you hear the sound of rushing water.*

**Perception Check**

**DC 5:** *Gasps and muffled shouts for help are coming from the pit. Splashing sounds indicate that someone may be trying to swim but failing to keep her head above water. From the sounds of it, she may have only moments to live before she drowns.*

**DC 12:** *Some liquid the dwarves are dumping into the pit splashes from the cup, and it sizzles when it hits the stone floor. It is undoubtedly acid.*

## Tactics

All of the duergar start with their warhammers strapped to their backs and a cup of acid in their hands. Their first attack is always a ranged attack with the acid: range 3; +4 vs. Reflex; 2 ongoing acid damage (save ends). They can make only one acid attack each. They'll move first to get within range, if necessary (or to shift away from an adjacent target). Then they ready their warhammers with a minor action.

The ants are trained to attack nonduergar, and the duergar have taught them simple commands to control the ants' behavior.

**3 Duergar Guards (G)** — **Level 4 Soldier**
Medium natural humanoid (devil) — XP 175 each

**Initiative** +6 — **Senses** Perception +4; darkvision
**HP** 58; Bloodied 29
**AC** 21; **Fortitude** 17, **Reflex** 15, **Will** 15
**Immune** illusion; **Resist** 5 fire, 5 poison
**Speed** 5

**Warhammer** (standard, at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
+11 vs. AC; 1d10 + 3 damage.

**Beard Quills** (minor, encounter) ✦ **Poison**
Ranged 3; +11 vs. AC; 1d8 + 3 damage, and ongoing 2 poison damage and -2 penalty to attack rolls (save ends both).

**Infernal Anger** (minor; recharge ⚄ ⚅) ✦ **Fire**
Until the start of the duerger guard's next turn, it deals an extra 4 fire damage when its melee attacks hit, and if an adjacent enemy moves or shifts during this period, the duerger guard can shift 1 square as an immediate reaction.

**Alignment** Evil — **Languages** Common, Deep Speech, Dwarven
**Skills** Dungeoneering +9

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Str** 14 (+4) | **Dex** 15 (+4) | **Wis** 15 (+4) |
| **Con** 18 (+6) | **Int** 10 (+2) | **Cha** 8 (+1) |

**Equipment** chainmail, warhammer

**2 Hive Warrior Giant Ants (A)** — **Level 2 Skirmisher**
Medium natural beast — XP 125 each

**Initiative** +6 — **Senses** Perception +0; low-light vision, tremorsense 10
**HP** 36; **Bloodied** 18
**AC** 16; **Fortitude** 14, **Reflex** 15, **Will** 11
**Speed** 8, climb 8

**Piercing Bite** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Acid**
+7 vs. AC; 1d8 + 4 damage. The warrior's attack deals 1d10 extra acid damage to any target that already has ongoing acid damage.

**Hive Warrior Frenzy** (free, when any giant ant within 10 squares of the hive warrior drops to 0 hit points; at-will)
The warrior is no longer marked or cursed, and it shifts 2 squares.

**Alignment** Unaligned — **Languages** –

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Str** 14 (+3) | **Dex** 17 (+4) | **Wis** 9 (+0) |
| **Con** 12 (+2) | **Int** 2 (-3) | **Cha** 4 (-2) |

## Saving Hequern

A female dwarf named Hequern is in the pit. Her hands are tied, making it difficult for her to tread water. A slack rope is tied under her shoulders and spiked to the side of the pit. She is drowning. To save her, the characters must remove the grate, pull her out of the pit, and heal her. (In game terms, Hequern is out of healing surges. She has just 3 hit points left and is losing 1 per round. Begin making death saves for Hequern on the 4th round. She goes last in the round.)

The rusty, acid-scarred grate is secured with a simple padlock. Opening it takes a Thievery check (DC 11, standard action). One of the duergar has the key on his belt, if it can be retrieved in time. Lifting the grate off the pit takes a Strength check (DC 8, minor action).

The rope is spiked to the wall of the pit about 2 feet below the top; it can be reached easily once the grate is removed. Pulling Hequern all the way out of the pit takes a Strength check (DC 15, standard action).

If Hequern is pulled from the pit with at least 1 hit point remaining, she can be brought back to consciousness with an easy Healing check (DC 5, standard action). If she is already making death saves, then she must be stabilized (Healing, DC 15, standard action), which brings her back to consciousness with just 1 hit point. In either case, she has no healing surges.

If Hequern is saved, she can provide useful information to the characters, as described in Encounter C2.

## Developments

Although the duergar in the next chamber can hear this battle, they do not aid the duergar here. They have been instructed by Spraugh to stay in their own area no matter what. This allows the heroes to take a short rest after the battle if needed.

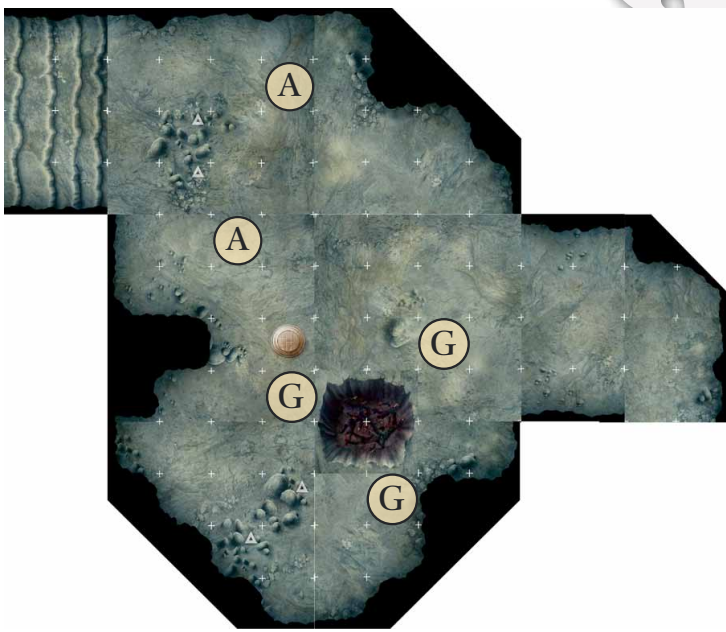
The duergar and ants fight to the death. If the characters save Hequern from drowning, she provides them with basic information about what has happened. More about this is discussed in Encounter C2.

## Features of the Area

**Illumination:** The area is dimly lit by weak torches around the cavern.

**Barrel of Acid:** One square on the map contains a barrel filled with acid. The barrel is too small to provide cover or block movement. With a DC 10 Strength check as a standard action, the barrel can be spilled into an adjacent square as an attack: +6 vs. Reflex; 1d10 + 4 acid damage, and 5 ongoing acid damage (save ends). As a move action, the barrel can be lifted and carried with a DC 10 Strength check.

**Pit:** The pit is 30 feet deep. Anyone falling into the pit takes no damage because the bottom is filled with 10 feet of water. A rope is staked near the top of the pit, just within arm's reach of the top. The rope is tied to Hequern, a female dwarf who is bound in the pit and is currently drowning. See "Saving Hequern" for more details.



# Encounter C2: The Best Laid Plans

**Skill Challenge Level 2 (375 XP)**

The characters can take a short rest after defeating the duergar and ants in encounter C1 and before beginning this skill challenge.

Assuming the characters rescued Hequern, she can answer some basic questions:

- She was captured while helping barricade areas and set traps to slow down the attackers.
- The duergar have been torturing her for several days, trying to get her to tell them where Coppernight is hidden, how to find him, and where the traps are.
- The duergar leader is very keen to learn details about all of the streams and pools within the mine.
- It has been days since the attack. The survivors must be running out of food and water.
- Hequern has felt tremors within the mine. It is possible that the area where Coppernight is hiding has become unstable because of the excavation they performed to separate themselves from the duergar and kobolds.
- There are so many barricades and traps between here and the place where the survivors are hiding that it probably would be impossible to reach them in time by that route.
- Coppernight was in the process of building a magical communication system which would allow people in different parts of the mine to speak to each other. This system is essentially a network of tiny tunnels connecting all the areas of the mine—excavated magically so they are just large enough for sound to pass through. Which chamber the sound goes to is also controlled magically.

Hequern knows where one of the magical communication nodes is in the audience chamber that the characters came through on their way to this area. She does not know how to use it. If the characters study it, they can undertake a skill challenge to activate the system and speak to Coppernight. By doing so, they can gain assistance in planning their attack and probably rescue Coppernight and the rest of the dwarves before their hiding place collapses or runs out of air.

## Contacting Coppernight

**Level:** 2 (375 XP)

**Complexity:** 3 (8 successes before 3 failures)

**Primary Skills:** Arcana, Dungeoneering, History, Nature, Thievery

*Arcana (DC 10, standard action, 4 maximum successes):* At least two successes in the skill challenge must be from Arcana checks in order to understand the arcane powers that the system uses.

*Athletics (DC 12, 1 success, 2 maximum successes):* You improve the system's performance by physically removing debris which blocks parts of it.

*Dungeoneering (DC 9, standard action, 1 success, 3 maximum successes):* At least two successes in the skill challenge must come from Dungeoneering checks. Understanding how sound travels underground and how passages are made help get the communication system functioning properly.

*Thievery (DC 12, 1 success, 3 maximum successes):* Some parts of the system work similarly to traps and alarm systems you have seen.

**Secondary Skills:** Athletics, History, Insight, Perception

*History (DC 13, trained only; 0 successes, 2 maximum successes):* You assist (+2 to the roll) the next character who makes a primary skill check by pointing out how Coppernight's design borrows concepts from a similar design employed in other dwarven constructions.

*Insight (DC 14, 0 successes, 2 maximum successes):* All inventions are created by equal parts ingenuity and inspiration. You have a flash of insight into how this system is meant to work which aids the next primary skill check (+2).

*Perception (DC 15, 0 successes, 2 maximum successes):* Your keen eye spots a detail that others overlooked, granting a +2 bonus on the next primary skill check.

**Success (8 successes before 3 failures):** The characters are able to contact Coppernight. He tells them that he and the other survivors are in a cavern deep beneath the upper levels of the mine. They are safe from the duergar, but they are out of food and water. Even worse, part of the cavern has collapsed, leaving them with only a few hours' worth of air.

On the plus side, Coppernight informs the characters that he and his workers had time to trap several tunnels in the mine as they retreated. In the next two chambers that the characters will enter, he can set off explosions of alchemist's fire which is rigged behind wooden barricades across side tunnels. All the characters need to do is holler "now" as loud as they can when they want the traps set off. For their own safety, they should stand at least 15 feet from the barricades when the traps are triggered. (Coppernight underestimates the power of his traps. A character standing 15 feet from a barricade will still be in the blast's area of effect. But then, Coppernight does say "at least" 15 feet.)

**Failure (3 failures before 8 successes):** The characters cannot get the magical communication system working properly, and they cannot make plans to coordinate their attack with Coppernight's help. In addition, the duergar are able to better prepare for the characters' attack. All enemy creatures gain a +4 bonus to initiative checks and Perception checks against the heroes.

# Encounter C3: The First Barricade

**Encounter Level 3 (800 XP)**

**1 dust devil** (D)
**2 kobold pikers** (K)
**3 duergar miners** (M)
**2 hive worker giant ants** (H)

Before retreating deeper into the mines and barricading themselves away from the kobold and duergar onslaught, Coppernight and his miners set traps to slow down the attackers. One of those trapped barricades is here. The duergar believe the barricade separates them from Coppernight and his miners, so they are working on a way to get past it.

**When the characters move into the area, read:**

*The sound of rushing water gets louder as you work your way deeper underground. Two giant ants scurry along the floor and walls of the chamber. Several duergar inspect a patchwork assembly of wood and metal which forms a barrier against one of the chamber walls. Two kobolds with pikes face toward you, their weapons at the ready. The air contains much swirling dust.*

Characters can make Stealth checks to try to gain a surprise round. The kobold guards are alert, with passive Perception scores of 17.

**Perception Check**
**DC 15:** *What appeared at first to be a simple swirl of stony dust is really a creature made of air and dust.*

## Tactics

Unless the characters were able to defeat the enemies in Encounter C1 without making any noise, the creatures here are aware of the intruders' presence. They were ordered to remain here, however, to figure out whether it is safe to remove the barricade and to make sure no one tries to escape through it. They haven't yet noticed that the barricade is trapped.

When the characters attack, the ants and the kobolds move forward first, hoping to get behind the characters and block escape. The duergar miners and dust devil hang back, waiting for the adventurers to come to them or until they can move forward to trap the characters in a flanking maneuver. This should give the characters a chance to shout the order for Coppernight to spring the trap and catch as many enemies as possible.

The creatures in the room fight to the death, because they know their theurge leader accepts no failure or retreat.

## Developments

Creatures in the next chamber probably hear this combat—they certainly hear the trap go off, if nothing else—but they, too, have orders to stay put and investigate the water.

**1 Dust Devil (D)** **Level 3 Skirmisher**
Small elemental magical beast (air, earth) XP 150

**Initiative** +7 **Senses** Perception +0
**HP** 47; Bloodied 23
**AC** 18; **Fortitude** 14, **Reflex** 16, **Will** 14; -2 to all defenses while slowed or immobilized
**Immune** disease, poison
**Speed** 8

⊕ **Grasping Winds** (standard; at-will)
+8 vs. Reflex; 1d10 + 3 damage, and the dust devil slides the target 2 squares.

↯ **Gale Blast** (move; recharge ⚄ ⁞⁞)
The dust devil shifts 5 squares and attacks each enemy it moves adjacent to (one attack per creature); +8 vs. Fortitude; the target is knocked prone.

✧ **Stinging Sands** (standard; encounter)
Close burst 3; +8 vs. Fortitude; 3d6 + 3 damage, and the target is blinded until the end of the dust devil's next turn.

**Alignment** Unaligned **Languages** Primordial
**Skills** Stealth +10

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Str** 8 (+0) | **Dex** 18 (+5) | **Wis** 8 (+0) |
| **Con** 15 (+3) | **Int** 5 (-2) | **Cha** 15 (+3) |

**2 Hive Warrior Giant Ants (A)** **Level 2 Skirmisher**
Medium natural beast XP 125 each

**Initiative** +6 **Senses** Perception +0; low-light vision, tremorsense 10
**HP** 36; Bloodied 18
**AC** 16; **Fortitude** 14, **Reflex** 15, **Will** 11
**Speed** 8, climb 8

⊕ **Piercing Bite** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Acid**
+7 vs. AC; 1d8 + 4 damage. The warrior's attack deals 1d10 extra acid damage to any target that already has ongoing acid damage.

**Hive Warrior Frenzy** (free, when any giant ant within 10 squares of the hive warrior drops to 0 hit points; at-will)
The warrior is no longer marked or cursed, and it shifts 2 squares.

**Alignment** Unaligned **Languages** –

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Str** 14 (+3) | **Dex** 17 (+4) | **Wis** 9 (+0) |
| **Con** 12 (+2) | **Int** 2 (-3) | **Cha** 4 (-2) |

| 3 Duergar Miners (M) | Level 5 Minion |
|---|---|
| Medium natural humanoid (devil) | XP 50 each |
| **Initiative** +5 | **Senses** Perception +4; darkvision |
| **HP** 1; a missed attack never damages a minion | |
| **AC** 20; **Fortitude** 17, **Reflex** 14, **Will** 17 | |
| **Immune** illusion; **Resist** 10 fire, 10 poison | |
| **Speed** 5 | |
| ⓘ **Warhammer** (standard, at-will) ✦ **Weapon** | |
| +3 vs. AC; 4 damage. | |
| **Alignment** Evil | **Languages** Common, Deep Speech, Dwarven |
| **Skills** Dungeoneering +11 | |
| **Str** 17 (+5) | **Dex** 13 (+3) **Wis** 14 (+4) |
| **Con** 20 (+7 | **Int** 10 (+2) **Cha** 7 (0) |
| **Equipment** chainmail, warhammer | |

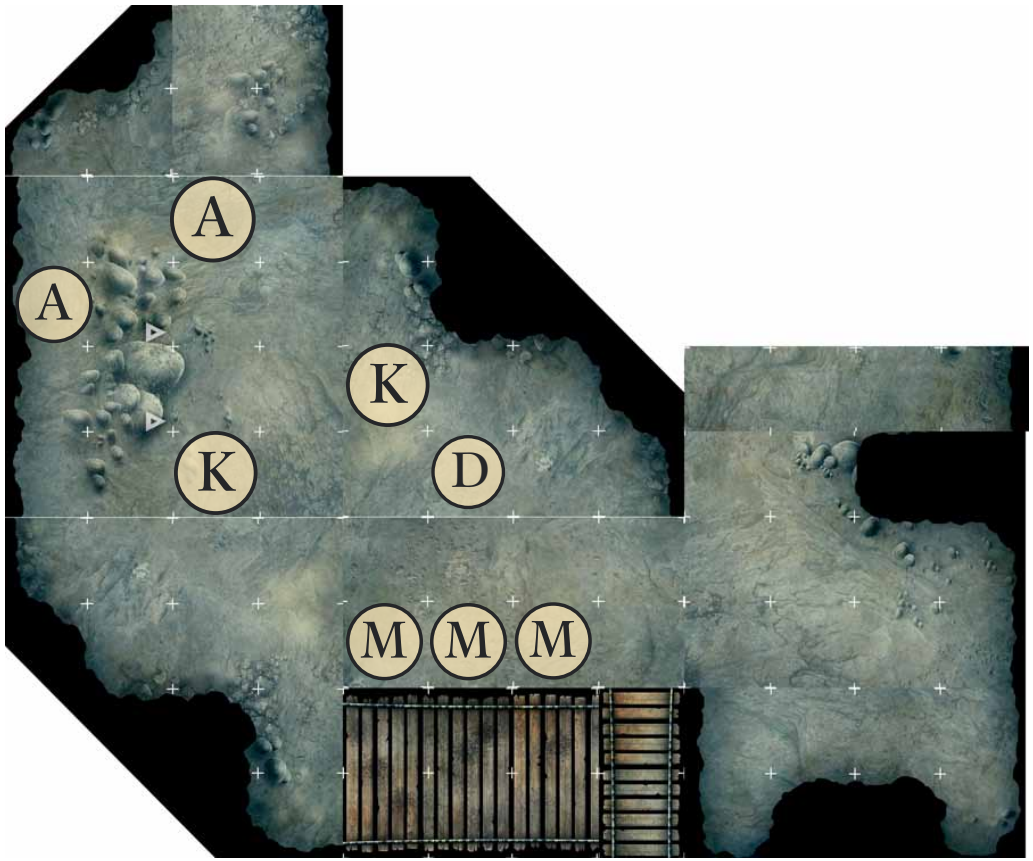
| 2 Kobold Pikers (K) | Level 2 Brute |
|---|---|
| Small natural humanoid | XP 125 each |
| **Initiative** +2 | **Senses** Perception +7; darkvision |
| **HP** 42; Bloodied 21 | |
| **AC** 15; **Fortitude** 15, **Reflex** 14, **Will** 14 | |
| **Speed** 6 | |
| ⓘ **Kobold Pike** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon** | |
| +5 vs. AC; 1d10 + 3 damage. | |
| **Warding Strike** (standard; recharge ⚄ ⁞⁞) ✦ **Weapon** | |
| +5 vs. Fortitude (+1 bonus per ally adjacent to the target); 1d10 + 3 damage and push 1 square. | |
| **Piker Tactics** | |
| If a piker readies an action to make a basic melee attack against a foe that enters a square adjacent to it, it gains +4 damage on that attack. | |
| **Shifty** (minor; at-will) | |
| The kobold shifts 1 square as a minor action. | |
| **Trap Sense** | |
| The kobold gains a +2 bonus to all defenses against traps. | |
| **Alignment** Evil | **Languages** Draconic |
| **Skills** Athletics +8, Stealth +9 | |
| **Str** 15 (+3) | **Dex** 13 (+2) **Wis** 12 (+2) |
| **Con** 12 (+2) | **Int** 7 (-1) **Cha** 10 (+1) |
| **Equipment** kobold pike, hide armor | |

## Features of the Area

**Illumination:** The area is brightly lit by lanterns.

**Barricade:** The marked area along the southern wall of the chamber is the barricade placed by Coppernight and his miners. Beyond the barricade is a narrow crawlspace where the miners placed jugs of alchemist's fire. If the characters were able to communicate with Coppernight via the skill challenge, they should recognize this trap. Coppernight will set off the charges when signaled by the characters (a loud shout in this chamber will do the trick).

When a character hollers to set off the trap, roll 1d6 and subtract the result from that character's initiative result. That's the point in the initiative order when the trap goes off. The explosion incinerates the barricade and sends a ball of flame roaring into the chamber. All creatures within 3 squares of the barricade are attacked: +8 vs. Reflex; 3d6 + 3 damage; all targets are knocked prone regardless of whether they were hit or missed by the attack. The trapped tunnel collapses.



# Encounter C4: The Pool of Uxichyrath

**Encounter Level 3 (827 XP)**

**1 Uxichyrath, duergar theurge** (T)
**2 duergar scouts** (S)
**4 infernal armor animuses** (A)
**1 hive soldier giant ant** (H)

This area is unlit. Unless the characters brought light sources with them, they may not be able to see much of what is described below.

A stream of water bubbles up from deep within the ground here. The stream has created a large pool. The water flows through a small channel through the rock, then re-emerges before pouring into a pit.

A duergar theurge called Uxichyrath (u-ZIK-ee-rath) has learned that this pool bubbles up from a portal to someplace fiendish. He believes that the water may hold some sort of infernal power. At the moment, he is trying to gauge where the water that falls into the pit ends up. He has ordered an ant to climb down into the pit.

**When the heroes enter the chamber, read:**

*A battle must have taken place here. Crystal clear water, roughly knee-deep to a human, pours out of a hole in the cavern wall. It forms a pool in front of the entrance before flowing off to the right, where you can hear the sound of falling water. Several suits of dwarf-sized armor litter the pool and the dry ground nearby.*

**When characters enter the pool or peer around the corner to the right, read:**

*A duergar stands near a pit where the water streams down with a loud hiss. He soundlessly waves his hand in your direction, as if irritated by your presence.*

**Perception Check**

**DC 12:** *What look like the antennae of a giant ant wave above the pit that the water is flowing into.*

**DC 17:** *The armor lying on the ground is empty, but the buckles and clasps are all fastened ... and it looks as if some of the armor is moving!*

## Tactics

The animuses remain still until the first attack against the theurge. At that point, the animuses stand up and attack, charging if necessary.

The two duergar scouts have the advantage of *underdark sneak* at the beginning of the encounter, unless the characters have done something special to negate it. They don't reveal themselves by attacking until they can do so with the *shadow attack* bonus.

The theurge stays back. He lets his minions and guards handle the melee while he bombards the characters with area attacks. The theurge is willing to damage the ant and the minions with his attacks, but he does not want to injure the scouts.

## Ending the Encounter

Once the characters defeat the theurge and his guards, they can either move to physically rescue Coppernight and the survivors, or they can use the communication system (if they succeeded at the skill challenge) to tell the dwarves that it is now safe to leave their refuge.

| **Uxichyrath, Duergar Theurge (T) Level 5 Controller** | |
|---|---|
| Medium natural humanoid (devil) | XP 200 |
| **Initiative** +2 | **Senses** Perception +11; darkvision |
| **HP** 63; Bloodied 31 | |
| **AC** 19; **Fortitude** 16, **Reflex** 16, **Will** 18 | |
| **Immune** illusion; **Resist** 5 fire, 5 poison | |
| **Speed** 5 | |
| ⊕ **Warhammer** (standard, at-will) ✦ **Weapon** | |
| +10 vs. AC; 1d10 + 1 damage. | |
| ➢ **Hellbolt** (standard, at-will) ✦ **Fire** | |
| Ranged 10; +9 vs. Reflex; 1d10 + 4 fire damage. | |
| ➢ **Infernal Quills** (minor, encounter) ✦ **Poison** | |
| Ranged 3; +10 vs. AC; 1d8 + 3 damage, and the target takes ongoing 2 poison damage and a -2 penalty to attack rolls (save ends both). | |
| ✧ **Wave of Despair** (standard, encounter) ✦ **Psychic** | |
| Close blast 5; +9 vs. Will; 1d8 + 4 psychic damage, and the target is slowed and dazed (save ends both). | |
| ✲ **Brimstone Hail** (standard, recharge ⚄ ⚅) ✦ **Fire** | |
| Area burst 2 within 15; +9 vs. Reflex; 3d6 + 4 fire damage, and the target is knocked prone. | |
| ✲ **Vile Fumes** (standard, recharges when first bloodied) ✦ **Poison** | |
| Area burst 2 within 15; +9 vs. Fortitude; 3d6 + 4 poison damage, and the target is blinded until the end of the duergar theurge's next turn. | |
| **Alignment** Evil | **Languages** Common, Deep Speech, Dwarven |
| **Skills** Arcana +7, Dungeoneering +13, Religion +7 | |
| **Str** 13 (+3) | **Dex** 12 (+3) **Wis** 18 (+6) |
| **Con** 16 (+5) | **Int** 15 (+4) **Cha** 11 (+2) |
| **Equipment** warhammer | |

**4 Infernal Armor Animuses (A)** **Level 3 Minion**
Medium immortal animate (devil, undead) XP 38 each

**Initiative** +5 **Senses** Perception +1; darkvision
**Bloodlust** aura 2; each nonminion devil within the aura gains a +1 bonus to damage rolls. Multiple boodlust auras grant a cumulative bonus.
**HP** 1; a missed attack never damages a minion
**AC** 19; **Fortitude** 16, **Reflex** 15, **Will** 14 **Resist** 5 fire
**Speed** 6

⊕ **Short Sword** (standard, at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
+8 vs. AC; 5 damage.

**Essence Transference** (when the infernal armor animus drops to 0 hit points) ✦ **Healing**
The nearest nonminion devil within 5 squares of the animus regains 15 hit points.

**Alignment** Evil **Languages** –
**Str** 19 (+5) **Dex** 14 (+3) **Wis** 10 (+1)
**Con** 15 (+3) **Int** 8 (0) **Cha** 11 (+1)
**Equipment** heavy shield, short sword

**Hive Warrior Giant Ant (H)** **Level 2 Skirmisher**
Medium natural beast XP 125

**Initiative** +6 **Senses** Perception +0; low-light vision, tremorsense 10
**HP** 36; Bloodied 18
**AC** 16; **Fortitude** 14, **Reflex** 15, **Will** 11
**Speed** 8, climb 8

⊕ **Piercing Bite** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Acid**
+7 vs. AC; 1d8 + 4 damage. The warrior's attack deals 1d10 extra acid damage to any target that already has ongoing acid damage.

**Hive Warrior Frenzy** (free, when any giant ant within 10 squares of the hive warrior drops to 0 hit points; at-will)
The warrior is no longer marked or cursed, and it shifts 2 squares.

**Alignment** Unaligned **Languages** –
**Str** 14 (+3) **Dex** 17 (+4) **Wis** 9 (+0)
**Con** 12 (+2) **Int** 2 (-3) **Cha** 4 (-2)

**2 Duergar Scouts (S)** **Level 4 Lurker**
Medium natural humanoid (devil) XP 175 each

**Initiative** +8 **Senses** Perception +9; darkvision
**HP** 48; Bloodied 24
**AC** 18; **Fortitude** 18, **Reflex** 16, **Will** 16
**Immune** illusion; **Resist** 5 fire, 5 poison
**Speed** 5

⊕ **Warhammer** (standard, at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
+8 vs. AC; 1d10 + 2 damage.

**Crossbow** (standard, at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
Ranged 15/30; +9 vs. AC; 1d8 + 4 damage.

**Infernal Quills** (minor, encounter) ✦ **Poison**
Ranged 3; +9 vs. AC; 1d8 + 3 damage, and the target takes ongoing 2 poison damage and a -2 penalty to attack rolls (save ends both).

**Shadow Attack**
A duergar scout's attacks deal 2d6 extra damage while the scout is invisible.

**Underdark Sneak** (minor; while in dim light or darkness and adjacent to an object or a wall that occupies at least 1 square; at-will)
The duergar scout becomes invisible until the end of its next turn or until after it hits or misses with an attack.

**Alignment** Evil **Languages** Common, Deep Speech, Dwarven
**Skills** Dungeoneering +9, Stealth +9
**Str** 15 (+4) **Dex** 17 (+5) **Wis** 14 (+4)
**Con** 18 (+6) **Int** 10 (+2) **Cha** 7 (0)
**Equipment** chainmail, crossbow, crossbow bolt x10, warhammer

## Features of the Area

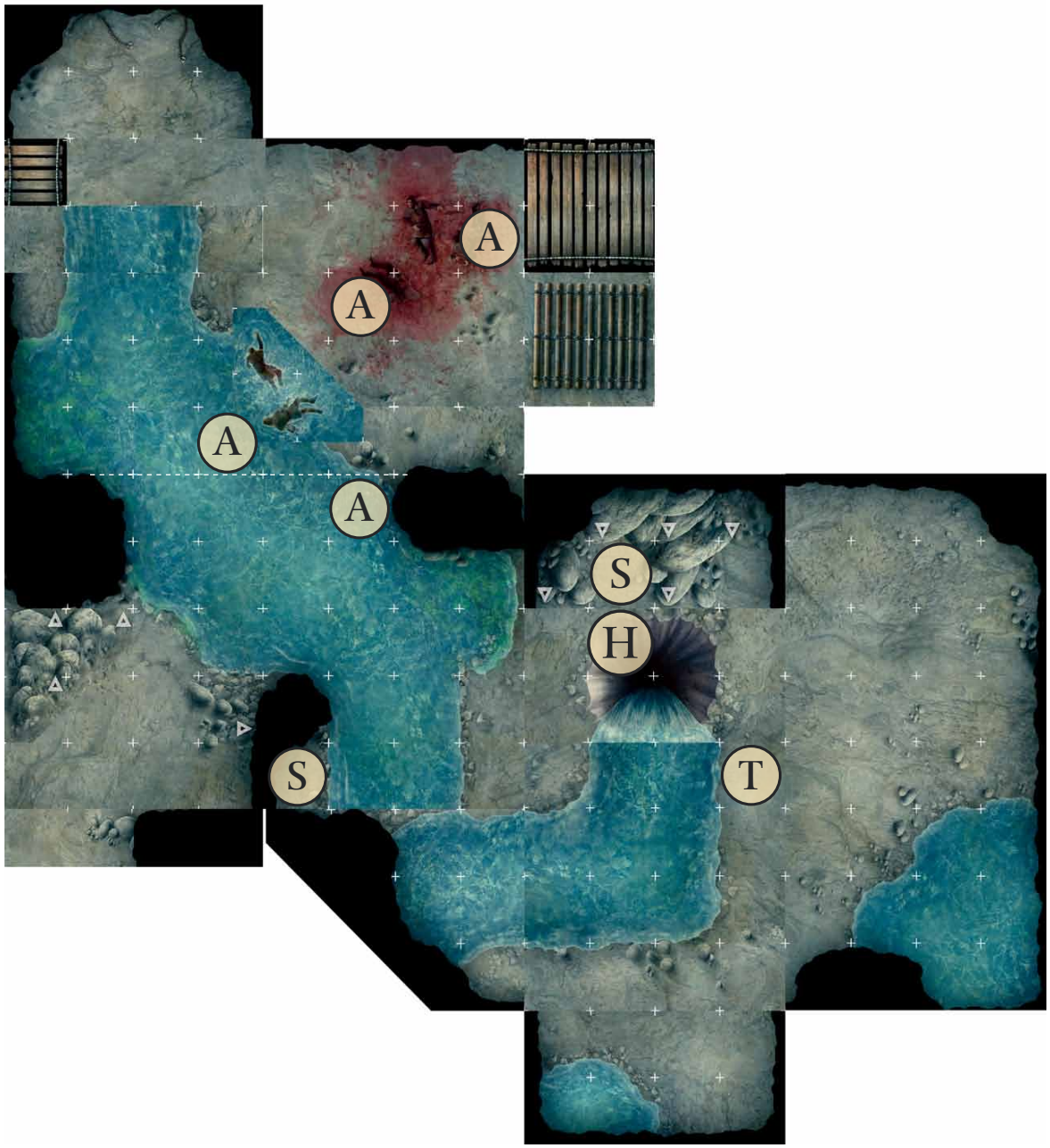
**Illumination:** The area is dark except for whatever light the characters bring with them.

**Barricades**: The wooden barricades on the far side of the pool cover elevators to deeper parts of the mine. Like the earlier barricade, these are trapped with alchemist's fire, and Coppernight can set them off when characters alert him with a loud shout, if he was contacted via the skill challenge. When a character hollers to set off the trap, roll 1d6 and subtract the result from that character's initiative result. That's the point in the initiative order when the trap goes off. All three traps detonate at the same time, filling the chamber to the dotted line with flame. Everyone in the area of effect suffers this attack: +8 vs. Reflex; 3d6 + 3 damage; all targets are knocked prone regardless of whether they were hit or missed by the attack. Animus minions who die in the explosion cannot use their *essence transference* ability. The trapped tunnels collapse.

**Pit:** The pit into which the stream flows plunges 40 feet down to the surface of a large, deep pool. Creatures falling into the pit take 4d10 damage, halved for ending in deep water. This can be reduced as normal with an Acrobatics check (trained only). Climbing out of the pit takes a DC 15 Athletics check; remember that it's 40 feet to the top.

**Pool:** The pool of water in front of the entrance is about knee deep, which makes it difficult terrain. The two smaller pools in the connected chamber are covered under "Stream."

**Stream:** The stream that leads into the pit is challenging terrain; it's not deep but it moves swiftly. Entering a stream square from a dry square calls for a DC 8 Acrobatics check. Failing this check means the creature loses its balance and movement for that




action ends immediately. If the result of the check is 4 or less, the creature also falls prone.

### *About the Author*

**Shawn Merwin** is a freelance writer, editor, and writing teacher. His previous work includes the *Dragon* Magazine's "Ecology of the Rust Monster," *Dungeon* Magazine's "Massacre at Fort Dolor" and "Gregor's Tangent," *Dungeon Delve*, and *P3: Assault on Nightwyrm Fortress*. Shawn has been an administator for the Living Forgotten Realms, Living Greyhawk, and Xen'drik Expeditions organized-play campaigns. He lives in western New York, near the shores of Lake Erie, with his wife and daughter.

# Chessenta

*By Brian R. James*

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*Through Unther we marched, victory hymn we did sing*
*Red standard blazing, adorned with crown and ring*
*The empire of old, a mighty debt they must pay*
*Nobody dared cross Chessenta when the red dragon was king.*

*With song on our lips and khopeshs held high*
*Hero leading the charge, our legions raised a cry,*
*For the Father of Chessenta we pledged our lives,*
*That day blood was spilt in the Riders to the Sky.*

*Tchazzar! Tchazzar! We fight for thee.*
*Grant us your strength and the will to be free.*

*–A popular battle hymn of Chessenta*

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## Society

Situated along the southern shore of the Inner Sea, the nation of Chessenta has undergone quite a transformation over the last century. Once a land of feuding city-states vying for the favor of ancient god-kings, the nation today stands unified under its indomitable war hero, ready to face the challenges of a world turned upside down.

### Culture

Chessenta has a well-earned reputation as a nation of fierce warriors and cunning tacticians. A proclivity toward wine and hard drink also brands them as a riotous, drunken people. Although no one can deny that Chessentans fight and feast often, this description misses the fundamental facet of Chessentan character—passion. The people of this land are energetic and enjoy life to its fullest, commonly engaging in acts that outsiders might consider reckless or extreme. Athleticism and competition is equally important in Chessentan society; popular sports include wrestling and chariot racing.

Few nations in all Faerûn can claim to be as erudite in philosophy, astronomy, poetry, and history as Chessenta. Theatres and libraries are commonplace, even in smaller cities, where poetry is read and philosophers debate in public squares.

Despite their supposed enlightenment, subjugation by the artificers of ancient Imaskar instilled in Chessentans a deep-seated mistrust of all things arcane. This irrational fear of magic has left a black mark on an otherwise progressive society. No amount of double talk or hand waving can wash away the stain of elven enslavement or a culture that breeds fanatical mage-killers.

### People

Chessenta is a human nation, its citizens predominantly of mulan ancestry. Chessentans are tall and slim, with a hint of olive in their skin coloring. Individuals typically have short, cropped hair ranging in color from black to deep brown. The folk of Chessenta have long mixed with neighboring Chondathan and Turami bloodlines, though some noble houses of Luthcheq claim to be "pure" mulan; these latter individuals can trace their unsoiled lineage to the god-kings of ancient Unther. House Karanok, it is said, has the divine blood of Nanna-Sin coursing through their veins. Despite such claims, respect and position in Chessenta is typically earned by acts of heroism and deed, not through birthright.

### Language

The Chessentan language, a dialect derived from ancient Untheric and written in the Thorass alphabet, is the predominant language spoken here. Scholars and noble born are still taught the older hieroglyphic style of ancient Untheric (incorporating Dethek runes employed by the dwarves of the Great Rift); carvings exist in ruins across the realms of the South.

### Economy

War is the lifeblood of Chessentan commerce, or so the popular saying goes. Skirmishes with Threskel are common and demands for fresh troops an ongoing need. This constant state of conflict attracts mercenaries from far and wide to test their mettle with the legendary warriors of Chessenta. Here, sellswords are outfitted in arms and mail of superior artistry, forged from ore pulled from local hills and mountains teeming with valuable metals—notably iron, silver, copper, and gold.

Beyond implements of war, Chessenta traders are best known as purveyors of quality oils and fine wine. Salt, gleaned at some risk from the Adder Swamp, is also a substantial export. Chessentan literature and fine art also remain in high demand, particularly so among the decadent burghers of Vesperin.

### Coinage

Chessentan coinage, once unique to each city-state, was consolidated into a single currency under the reign of War Hero Ishual Karanok in the Year of the Fallen Friends (1399 DR). Bronze "bits" are roughly equivalent in value to 2 coppers from other lands, silvers are called talents, and gold coins are drakes. The distinctive authokh (5 gp value) and belbolt (20 gp value) replace platinum pieces as the preferred coinage of merchants and nobility. Minted in Luthcheq, coins feature the crowned bust of War Hero Shala Karanok on the face and the burning brand of House Luthcheq on the reverse.

## History

Chessenta's long and bloody history is chronicled using the Untheric calendar (UC), established by the god-king Gilgeam at the dawn of the Second Untheric Empire (-734 DR). Dates presented here use the Dalereckoning (DR) standard. Present day (1480 DR) equates to 2215 UC in the Untheric calendar.

**History DC 20:** Established in -1771 DR, Chessenta was founded as an autonomous province of the First Untheric Empire; the fiefdom adopting its name from its first imperial magistrate, Grand Viceroy Iphram Chess. With his first official proclamation, Chess decreed the territory be cleansed of all indigenous species, notably the darker-skinned Turami of the Akana and the Batoi halfling populations along the Adder River.

Over the next several centuries Chessenta earned its reputation as a fierce warrior society, bolstered by decisive Untheric campaigns against eastern Jhaamdath and the fey of the Methwood. Unfortunately for the province, Chessenta's many conquests and growing self-determination drew the ire of the god-king Gilgeam, who quickly sent troops to bring them under heel. With the urging of the war hero Tchazzar, open rebellion soon spread. In the Year of Flashing Eyes (929 DR) the allied cities of Chessenta marshaled their forces and drove the legions of Unther back beyond the Riders to the Sky, forever securing their independence.

A pivotal moment in Chessentan history came in the Year of the Dracorage (1018 DR), when Overking Tchazzar disappeared fighting the sahuagin sea devils of the Alamber Sea. Chessentan faithful believed their king had ascended to godhood, and the Church of Tchazzar soon flourished throughout the realm.

Over time, though, the unified kingdom Tchazzar had built ultimately broke up into squabbling city-states. Decade after decade, territorial clashes threatened to bring the nation to utter ruin. Fortuitously, neighboring Unther and Chondath had their own problems to attend to and could not take advantage of the discord within Chessenta.

The civil strife that had long plagued the region came to an abrupt end in the Year of Rogue Dragons (1373 DR), when immortal Tchazzar returned to Faerûn to reestablish his dominion over Chessenta. As the dragon-king set his plans of conquest into motion, neighbors along the Inner Sea rightly feared the potential of a unified Chessenta. Only the ill-fated Spellplague and the unparalleled devastation that followed would halt Tchazzar's indomitable machinations.

## The Last Century

**History DC 15:** Still reeling from the upheaval of the Wailing Years, Chessenta soon found its borders overrun by aberrant horrors from the sea and hulking beasts from its inland frontier. Led by the dragon-king Tchazzar, the nation's armies fought valiantly against their common foe. But when the Father of Chessenta one day failed to return from an expedition in the east, the nation's fractious city-states began to waver and fall before the monstrous horde.

After decades of bloodshed and ruin, a new champion emerged to lead the despondent people—Ishual Karanok. Only through his insightful leadership and valorous deeds did Chessenta ultimately prevail. When the celebrations had ended and the armies disbanded, Chessentans discovered that they stood alone as the last of the "Old Empires of the grim and magical South."

## Recent Events

In recent months brigands and beasts have threatened settlements along the Threskel frontier while Imaskari pirates harry shipping along coastal waters. The call has gone out across the Inner Sea for mercenaries and adventurers to aid Chessenta in the fight against its enemies and help unmask a murderer known as the "Green Hand Killer."

## Religion

Over the last century, Chessentan faithful have largely abandoned the teachings of their old religions in favor of the contemporary human pantheon worshiped throughout greater Faerûn.

In the tumultuous years following the Spellplague, Amaunator's faith gained a strong following in Chessenta. The faithful saw the resurgent sun god as Hokatep of old, returned to Faerûn to aid his long-suffering people in their time of greatest need. The colonnaded house of Amaunator, in Luthcheq's Temple Square, is a grand site to behold; an enormous sundial reaches skyward in front of the temple.

Likewise, other mainstream faiths have gained a foothold in this ancient land by adopting many of the nation's longstanding religious traditions and holy days. Here, warrior-priests of Tempus aggrandize the martial wisdom of Anhur, adopting the vestments and fighting tactics of the elite Militars. Oghman lorekeepers maintain a large temple in Erebos, where they preserve the scrolls of divine scrivener Thalatos. Also prominent in Chessentan society is the burgeoning faith of Waukeen, goddess of wealth and trade. Interestingly, with the absence of Kelemvor's faith in the region, Waukeenar clerics also act as guardians of the dead, performing funeral services in the ancient Neselthian tradition. Finally, Sune's exarch Sharess remains popular throughout Chessenta as patron of felines and sensuality, though she is known locally as Bast.


### The Captive Flame

**Brotherhood of the Griffon, Book 1**
**Richard Lee Byers**
Take flight over the skies of Chessenta with Captain Aoth Fezim and his mercenary company, the Brotherhood of the Griffon—Richard Lee Byers' most celebrated characters, introduced in The Haunted Lands trilogy, available in fine bookstores May 2010.

Faiths unknown outside Chessenta are detailed below. Each entity's sphere of influence is noted in square brackets.

### Tchazzar

**Father of Chessenta, the Invincible Overking**
**Evil Exarch of Tiamat [Hubris]**
**Symbol:** Red dragon against a mountain
Since the time of the nation's founding, the name Tchazzar (CHA-zar) has been synonymous with Chessenta. Though Tchazzar was known as a war hero and Overking, learned folk suspected he was in fact a dragon in disguise. Most did not care because they were happy to have a strong leader who brought strength and prosperity to their country. Tchazzar believed that if he were to take on human form, unite and rule Chessenta for a time, and then disappear mysteriously, the people would worship him as a god. He was right. Priests of Tchazzar are known as wyrmlairds; the most powerful of them can breathe fire and command red dragons.

### Entropy

**Great Nothing, Swallower of Gods, Magechill**
**Unaligned Primordial [Oblivion]**
**Symbol:** A sphere of pure black
Befuddling sages and theologians for millennia, Entropy's (EN-trah-pee) true purpose was at last revealed upon the calamitous joining of worlds brought on by the Spellplague. As the Swallower of Gods and the Devourer of Worlds, Entropy has represented the single direst threat to the mortal world since the Age before Ages. In that long ago era, when Ao banished the primordials to Abeir, the overgod imprisoned Entropy in the guise of a sphere of annihilation and discarded the inert primordial on Toril with a warning to the gods: *Govern the world wisely or face utter oblivion.* With Cyric's folly and the unraveling of the Weave, Entropy is freed once more to spread ruin across the face of Toril. Every day the primordial's entropic maw grows wider, threatening to swallow the world whole, while the weakened powers of the Astral Sea stand powerless to stop it. Priests of Entropy are known as thaumatoclasts.

### Sebakar

**Lord of Crocodiles, the Smiling Death**
**Evil Archfey [Wetlands]**
**Symbol:** Crocodile head surmounted by a horned, plumed headdress.
Compared to the other beings worshiped in Chessenta, crocodile-headed Sebakar (seh-ba-KAR) is something of an anathema: the offspring of a forbidden union between the ancient Mulhorandi manifestation of Set and a bestial archfey of the Feywild known as Mornach. Sebakar is strong, but also cruel and capricious. He is venerated primarily by his "children," a brutal civilization of werecrocodiles inhabiting the wetlands of the Adder Swamp. Some say that Sebakar dwells at the darkest heart of the swamp, but no reports of the "Smiling Death" have surfaced in decades. Priests of Sebakar are known as swamplords.

## Geography

Chessenta is situated along the southern shore of the Sea of Fallen Stars (Inner Sea), between the nations of Akanûl and Tymanther. Much is said of its beautifully sculpted landscape; it has terraced vineyards upon gentle rolling hills, expansive orchards of olive trees, and verdant grazing pastures for sheep and rothé.

In this nation of elite warriors and ancient faiths, Chessenta is an ideal region to set a martial or divine themed D&D® campaign. Likewise, with its bizarre customs and relative isolationism, Chessenta serves as a great sandbox to import a homebrew faith or alternative magic system. In Ed Greenwood's home campaign, Chessenta serves as one of his "back pockets," where a weirdo priest or dotty ruler could "be from." I encourage you to also embrace this particular facet of usefulness and customize Chessenta for the unique needs of your own campaign.

—Brian R. James

The coastal countryside along the eastern shore of the great bay enjoys fertile soil and abundant crops. Living here is good and generally safe, though an occasional wolf pack or owlbear comes in from the deepest woods, but seldom anything fiercer. As one travels inland and south from the coast, the landscape becomes increasingly rugged and monster-infested. Settlements beyond the coast congregate along Chessenta's largest watercourse, the Adder River.

### Regional Features

**Adder Hills:** This majestic chain of soaring earthmotes is one of the most inspiring sights in all Faerûn. A century ago, when the cerulean fires of the Spellplague crisscrossed the land, the Adder Hills escaped their earthly bonds to float a thousand feet or more over the Chessentan frontier. Despite periodic shifts in elevation, the flying peaks remain more or less in a fixed position over the cratered landscape below.

Few cross underneath the Adder Hills without some trepidation that the mighty peaks might crash down upon them at a moment's notice. The floating isles are home to warring tribes of aarakocra and avariel, neither of which welcome outsiders into their lands.

**Adder Swamp:** This murky wetland infested by innumerable insects and vermin is home to the lycanthrope nation of Sebakar. Here werecrocodiles constitute the noble class, the "Children of Sebakar" as they call themselves, and they govern from long-forgotten ruins drowned during the height of the Second Untheric Empire. Wererats represent the lower class, serving merchants and laborers.

**Bay of Chessenta:** Chessentan roads are poorly maintained, so most merchant traffic between cities is ferried across the bay. Oar-powered triremes are the vessel of choice in these waters, in part because the breeze on the bay often withdraws for days at a time.

The coastline has many small harbors and quays where sea vessels can come ashore. Numerous incursions earlier in the century by horrors from the sea led to heavily fortified ports, buttressed by high sea walls and massive countersiege weapons.

The threat in recent years has come not from denizens of the deep, but from increased piracy. The Crimson Sea Maritime Priakos, a thinly veiled society of smugglers and cutthroats masquerading as a legitimate merchant company, operates out of Watcher's Cape and controls most of the nation's sea trade.

**Fields of Oriam:** Few human settlements exist within this rolling, grassland savannah south of the Bay of Chessenta. The soil here is too dry and acidic to support human agriculture, but it's the ever-present threat posed by the indigenous cockatrices that discourages most Chessentan homesteaders from settling in the region. Here ancient Untheric ruins lay

scattered among the tall grasses and scattered pine barrens. The most legendary of these ruins is the Lost Temple of Ptah, rumored to house holy tablets containing unimaginable power and wisdom.

**Lake Akax:** Lake Akax is a deep hypersaline lake, avoided by all but the most foolhardy adventurers. Called the "Ghostmere" by those who fear it, the lake is home to a species of elemental ooze that mimics the appearance of those who die within its briny waters. During the winter months, the shoreline solidifies into a toxic sludge that is caustic enough to dissolve away flesh and bone.

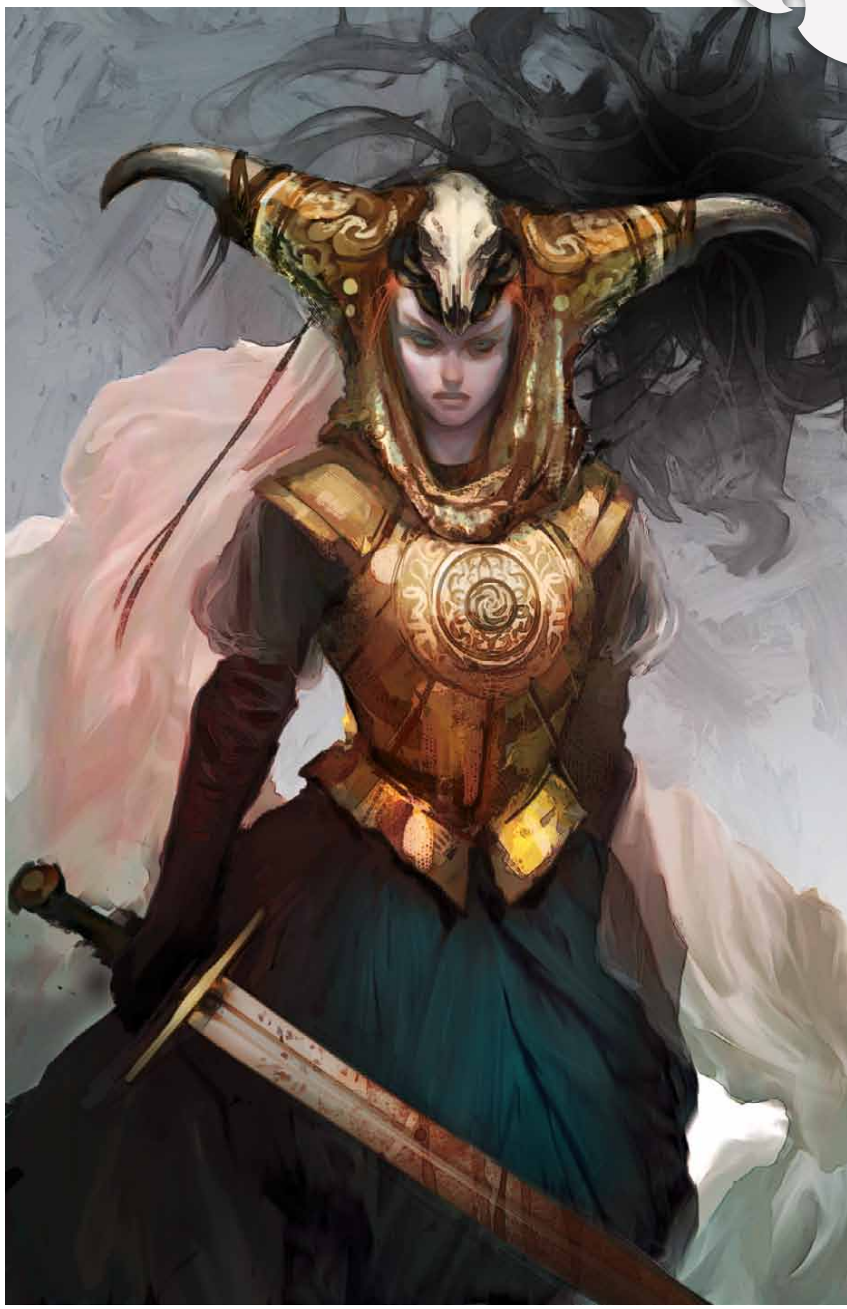
**Maerchwood:** This once verdant woodland nestled away in southern Chessenta suffered greatly at the touch of the Spellplague. The blue fires of that period thrust the landscape hundreds of feet in the air forming a great escarpment; the ancient forest atop it is lifeless and petrified. Today, the dread forest and its secrets are protected by a wrathful shadow guardian known only as the Stormwalker.

**Maerwatch, The:** These low but rugged hills have long been mined by Chessentans for their abundant mineral wealth, primarily in copper and silver deposits. Unfortunately for miners (and adventurers!), a colony of rust monsters also inhabits these hills. Every decade or so, the King of Tulach (population 1,100) sends mercenaries into the Maerwatch to exterminate the ravenous vermin, but inevitably the rust monsters always return.

**Maw of the God Swallower:** Few places in all Faerûn are as feared as this expansive region of plagueland in south-central Chessenta. Unlike other pockets of Spellplague that distort terrain or bend natural laws, the Maw of the God Swallower is a growing cyst of utter annihilation. At its periphery, the sky darkens suddenly and the soil underfoot crumbles away to dust. Moving farther in, the scarred landscape suddenly falls away like a great penetrating wound carved into the soul of the world. At the heart of the void, suspended above the nothingness, hangs Entropy, the mere sight of which is said to shatter a mortal mind.

**Methmere:** The serene, placid water of this great freshwater sea belies the dangers that lurk in its depths. Beneath the bubbling waters lives a society of marine trolls known as scrags. The scrags are highly territorial and diligently patrol their demesnes on domesticated aquatic behemoths (plesiosaurs). For this reason, few settlements line its coast and only a fool with a death wish would dare ply a craft on these waters. Volcanic vents on the lake floor heat the dark waters and send clouds of mists into the heights of the Sky Riders to the north.

**Sky Riders:** These rough hills along the Chessentan frontier are rich with mineral wealth and thick with monsters. The northern reaches, around Dragonback Mountain, are firmly under the dominion of Alasklerbanbastos, the Great Bone Wyrm and self-proclaimed Dragon King of Old Unther. The southern peaks are home to the predatory, screeching tuuru—a race of winged drakes used as mounts by tribes of nomadic wilden (mimicking the elite aerial warriors of Unther from days of yore). Legends say that Tchazzar dwells somewhere within the remote crags of the Sky Riders, waiting for a time when his people need him once more.



## Notable Settlements

The Chessentan countryside is dotted with numerous cities and small principalities (far more than are visible on the included map). Where in the last century each settlement would adopt its own customs and conscript its own army, today the nation's provincial allegiances are largely solidified under the firm rule of Luthcheq.

Catalogued below are some of the more well-known settlements of Chessenta.

**Apecoe:** With its deep, sheltered harbor teaming with abundant wildlife, the seaside village of Apecoe (population 2,500) is a fisher's paradise. Apecoe serves as the primary port for goods flowing to Luthcheq. The village has successfully warded off several pirate assaults, in part due to a series of ingenious stone beacons built along the coast, which signal the approach of hostile ships.

**Erebos:** Representative of the quintessential Chessentan polis with its large granite monuments and classical Untheric architecture, Erebos is a teaming metropolis second only to Luthcheq in size or power. This cosmopolitan port is celebrated for its rich culture and comfortable living. Despite frequent earthquakes in the region, buildings are surprisingly sturdy yet beautifully designed. Isolated from much of the nation by the Adder Swamp and the Bay of Chessenta, Erebos enjoys a measure of independence from Luthcheq and its poison-dagger politics. Erebosar, as citizens call themselves, are regarded by outsiders as a haughty people, though much more tolerant of foreign customs than many other Chessentan cities.

**Heptios:** Once a formidable city-state in its own right, today Heptios (population 9,000) is firmly under the dominion of Luthcheq. Heptios remains a city of commerce, facilitating the trade of goods in and out of eastern Chessenta. Despite being a puppet of the Karanok's, Administrator Epremusa secretly plots against the war hero of Luthcheq in a bid to regain her city's independence.

**Luthcheq:** Built against towering black cliffs, Luthcheq is as intimidating as it is impregnable. Its labyrinthine streets are equally disorienting to invaders as they are to newcomers, which is perhaps one of the reasons why the place is known as the City of Madness. The city's major districts include the Palace Heights (site of the city's renowned War College), Temple Square (rejuvenated from the ruins of the old priests' quarter, once dominated by the Temple of Entropy), the Trade Center (the heart of Luthcheq commerce), the Old Port (residence of the bourgeoning middle class), the Arcane Byway (a quarantine zone for those foolish enough to flaunt their wizardry), and the Ropemakers' Quarter (slums where

### Erebos

The following information is common knowledge about the city of Erebos.

**Population:** 35,000. Erebosian citizens are predominantly human, composed of three ethnicities: mulan (40%), chondathan (20%), and turami (15%); dragonborn (10%) and genasi (5%) round out the city's cosmopolitan makeup.

**Government:** Erebos is governed by an enigmatic magistrate known only as the Sceptanar. This faceless lord holds the ancient scepter of Tchazzar and rules with absolute authority over the city and its outlying land-holdings. Despite this power, the current Sceptanar is widely regarded as a wise and beneficent ruler.

**Defenses:** Despite its embrace of the fine arts, Erebos is also a city of warriors. The city fields an army 8,000 strong, led by the elite dragonscale-clad myrmidons. The Sceptanar is a mighty foe, commanding the blessed vestments of Tchazzar. Erebos's formidable flotilla of warships and troop transports (capable of ferrying the city's 5,000 battle-tested marine warriors) has never lost a sea engagement in nearly four decades of service

**Inns and Taverns:** Establishments likely to be frequented by adventurers include the following: Plonk (tavern), Red Dog (tavern), Alderman's Hall (boarding house), Bronze Windlass (inn). Drinking and socializing is also commonplace among Erebos's many fine *thermae* (public bath houses).

**Supplies:** Goods from shores all across the Sea of Fallen Stars are sold in Erebos's central market.

**Temples:** Despite many invasions, an ancient temple consecrated by Tiamat, blessed mother of Tchazzar, stands defiantly on a jagged plinth overlooking the sea.

**Allies:** Erebos maintains good relations with the werecrocodiles of the Adder Swamp.

**Enemies:** Erebos has strained relations with Aglarond and is highly suspicious of Thay and High Imaskar in the East.

the poor are jammed into tenements that lean drunkenly against each other). Spellcasters in Luthcheq can expect a swift execution unless they agree to have green tattoos inked on their palms, marking them as practitioners of their vile craft.

**Pandrick:** The fortress city of Pandrick (population 6,500) is the cultural antithesis of Erebos. Like the fabled Akanaxian warriors of old, citizens of Pandrick (both male and female) are bonded into military service at a young age and trained in martial combat. King Zeareus of Pandrick entered into an uneasy truce with Luthcheq several years ago, but with the Karanok's attentions focused on Threskel, some predict that Pandrick will soon break the agreement and march on the Chessentan capital.

**Samnur:** The small coastal village of Samnur (population 1,300) is notable mostly for its history. Earlier in the century, the legendary champion Ishual Karanok first engaged the Abolethic Sovereignty here and drove their minions back into the sea. A granite monument commemorating the victory stands on a hill overlooking the village. Unknown to outsiders, though, Samnur houses a hidden temple of Umberlee. The sanctuary is accessible only through a concealed grate in the lagoon floor.

**Saden:** An independent inland thorp (population 900) notable for the ancient temple of Marduk, which dominates the central plaza. Today, temple priests espouse the modern teachings of Bahamut, yet still practice the old custom of painting an extra pair of eyes and ears upon their shaved scalps.

**Soolabax:** This walled frontier town (population 1,600) in eastern Chessenta has a sizable market and serves as one of few bastions against raiders pouring in from Threskel. The town is governed by Baron Hasos Thora, a long-nosed lackey in service to Luthcheq.

## Luthcheq

The following information is common knowledge about the capital city of Luthcheq.

**Population:** 38,000. The vast majority (90%) of Luthcheq citizens are humans of the mulan ethnicity. This insular society clings to the ancient customs of the "Old Empires," which views nonhumans—particularly elves or their feytouched kin—with suspicion and fear.

**Government:** Luthcheq has long been governed by House Karanok. The city's current demagogue is the War Hero Shala Karanok, a scowling, solidly built woman in her middle years.

**Defenses:** Luthcheq's vertical sprawl and maze-like byways are often enough to dissuade likely conquerors. Beyond that, Luthcheq has enough coin to purchase the finest mercenary troops in the Inner Sea, bolstered by its home-grown guards.

**Inns and Taverns:** Prominent taverns include Black Mercy, Vampire's Tooth, and Bale's Bones. The venerable Flaming Griffon (inn) is a city landmark, one of the few remaining structures that predate the Spellplague.

**Supplies:** Visitors to Luthcheq absolutely must visit the Trade Center in Old City. This distinctive trapezoidal-shaped marketplace is massive, its sweeping vaulted roof supported by scores of fluted columns. The underside of the roof is painted in magnificent depictions of heroism and athletic prowess.

**Temples:** Luthcheq's religious quarter houses many small shrines and temples, with the most prominent sanctuaries dedicated to Waukeen and Amaunator.

**Allies:** Luthcheq is working fervently to secure preferred trading status with neighbors Akanûl and Tyamanther.

**Enemies:** Traditional enemies include Netheril and the fey of the Methwood. Recent monstrous incursions from Threskel, however, have Luthcheq's forces marshaling along Chessenta's eastern border.

**Thurik:** This ramshackle collection of buildings (population 300) is little more than a trading post, permitting the lycanthropes of the Adder Swamp to trade with the merchants of Erebos. Adventurers seeking the flooded ruins of Soorenar often resupply in Thurik, which lies only a few miles from the sunken city.

**Toreus:** Once a garrison post for troops out of Mordulkin, Toreus has grown over the last century into the nation's third largest city (population 17,000). The city's aggressive commercial tactics and suspected ties with pirate and other criminal organizations have further hastened the ire of rival city-states. In defiance of Chessentan law, Toreus openly trades with Thay and hosts a Red Wizard enclave.

# Bestiary

The Chessentan wilds are veritably swarming with ferocious beasts and lurking horrors. Included herein is an iconic monstrosity from Faerûn's "Old Empires," the werecrocodile.

## Werecrocodile

Denizens of fetid swamplands and bloated flood plains, werecrocodiles are well feared for their adroit hunting prowess and taste for human flesh.

## Werecrocodile Tactics

Werecrocodiles are adept at swiftly changing form to gain an advantage against prey. In its crocodilian guise, a werecrocodile attempts to clamp upon its prey, then drown the helpless victim within the swamp. In human form, most are masters with a khopesh blade. But werecrocodiles are most dangerous in their natural hybrid form—that of a crocodile-headed humanoid.

| **Lockjaw** | **Level 8 Disease** | **Endurance** improve DC 29, maintain DC 25, worsen DC 24 or lower |
|---|---|---|
| The target is cured. | **Initial Effect:** The target takes a –2 penalty to Reflex. | Target takes a –2 penalty to Reflex. Each time the target fails to improve from this step, the target takes an additional –2 penalty. | **Final State:** When the target's Reflex reaches 0, the victim is permanently immobilized and can't take actions. The target can be cured only by a Remove Affliction ritual or any effect that can end the petrified condition. |

| **Werecrocodile** | **Level 8 Soldier** |
|---|---|
| Large natural humanoid (shapechanger) | XP 350 |
| **Initiative** +8 | **Senses** Perception +7, low-light vision |
| **HP** 87; **Bloodied** 43 | |
| **Regeneration** 5 | |
| **AC** 24; **Fortitude** 21, **Reflex** 20, **Will** 20 | |
| **Immune** lockjaw; **Vulnerable** silver (if the werecrocodile takes damage from a silver weapon, its regeneration does not function on its next turn) | |
| **Speed** 6 (swim 6 in crocodile form) | |
| ⓣ **Khopesh** (standard; usable only in humanoid or hybrid form; at-will) ✦ **Weapon** | |
| +15 vs. AC; 2d6 + 5 damage, and the target is marked until the end of the werecrocodile's next turn. | |
| ⓣ **Bite** (standard; usable only while in hybrid or crocodile form; at-will) ✦ **Disease** | |
| +13 vs. Fortitude; 2d6 + 5 damage, the target is grabbed, and the werecrocodile makes a secondary attack. The werecrocodile cannot make *bite* attacks while grabbing a creature. | |
| *Secondary Attack:* +19 vs. Will; the target contracts lockjaw disease. | |
| ⸸ **Clamping Jaws** (standard; usable only in hybrid or crocodile form; at-will) | |
| Targets a grabbed creature; no attack roll; 2d8 + 4 damage. | |
| **Monstrous Retort** (immediate interrupt, when hit by a melee attack; recharge ⚄ ⚅) | |
| The werecrocodile takes half damage from the triggering attack and makes a free basic attack against the attacker. | |
| **Change Shape** (minor; at-will) ✦ **Polymorph** | |
| A werecrocodile can alter its physical form to appear as a crocodile or a unique Medium humanoid. | |
| **Alignment** Unaligned | **Languages** Common |
| **Skills** Athletics +14, Religion +11 | |
| **Str** 20 (+9) | **Dex** 14 (+6) | **Wis** 17 (+7) |
| **Con** 15 (+6) | **Int** 15 (+6) | **Cha** 12 (+5) |

# Magic Items

The storied items presented here are examples of the many fantastic treasures to be unearthed in Chessenta.

## Royal Regalia of Chessenta

Centuries ago, for his coronation, Tchazzar commissioned three objects of regalia to exemplify his sovereign might. When wielded in unison, the Royal Regalia of Chessenta grants the blessings of Tiamat Today, only the whereabouts of the Scepter is widely known; the device is currently in the possession of the Septanar of Erebos. Sages speculate that one or both of the other items might be hidden within Tchazzar's secret reliquary, buried within a vault deep within the Sky Riders.

See *Adventurer's Vault 2*, page 92 for more details on item sets.

### ROYAL REGALIA OF CHESSENTA ITEMS

| Lvl | Name | Price (gp) | Item Slot |
|---|---|---|---|
| 15 | Scepter of Cimbar | 25,000 | Implement |
| 15 | Tiamat's Bloody Bulwark | 25,000 | Weapon |
| 15 | Crownring of Tchazzar | 25,000 | Head |

### ROYAL REGALIA OF CHESSENTA BENEFITS

| Pieces | Benefit |
|---|---|
| 2 | You gain a +4 item bonus to Charisma-based skill checks and ability checks. |
| 3 | You gain the Boon of the Undying Queen power, described below. |

### Boon of the Undying Queen — Item Set Power

*The vitality of Tiamat, Queen of Dragons, flows through you healing your wounds.*

**Daily ✦ Healing**
**No Action** **Personal**
**Trigger:** You are reduced to 0 hit points or fewer
**Effect:** You regain all your hit points and automatically save against each effect on you that a save can end. In exchange, you lose all remaining healing surges.

### Scepter of Cimbar — Level 15

*This 2-foot silver rod is inset with pieces of jet, which have been carved and positioned to resemble a stylized dragon rampant. The scepter's ball-shaped hilt has a hole through its center, so that the implement can be hung on a sash cord around the waist.*

Level 15 +3 25,000 gp
**Implement (Rod)**
**Enhancement Bonus:** Attack rolls and damage rolls
**Critical:** +1d8 damage per plus
**Property:** You gain telepathy 10.
**Property:** You gain a +3 item bonus to Insight and Perception checks.
**Power (Daily ✦ Illusion):** Standard Action. You gain the appearance of a faceless, androgynous humanoid of average build. The illusion lasts for 24 hours, or until you end it as a minor action.

### Tiamat's Bloody Bulwark — Level 15

*This breathtaking crimson shield, crafted from a single immense scale pried from the hide of Tiamat, protects its wielder from even the mightiest blows.*

Level 15 25,000 gp
**Item Slot:** Arms
**Shield:** Heavy
**Power (Encounter):** Immediate Interrupt. *Trigger:* A critical hit would be scored against you. *Effect:* The attack becomes a normal hit.

### Crownring of Tchazzar — Level 15

*A simple mithral circlet engraved with Iokharic runes reads: "Through worship ascended, by fire consumed, a god-king is reborn".*

**Item Slot:** Head 25,000 gp
**Property:** You gain a +3 item bonus to saving throws against effects that include daze, stun, or dominate.
**Power (Daily):** Standard Action. You conjure an abishai vestige, which lasts until the end of the encounter. The vestige allows you to fly with a speed of 8, and it also allows you to use the following at-will power.
**Immediate Interrupt:** *Trigger:* An adjacent enemy shifts. *Effect:* Targets triggering creature; Wisdom vs. Reflex; 2d10 + Charisma modifier fire damage, and you shift 1 square.

### *About the Author*

**Brian R. James** lives in the Seattle area with his wife, four children and house full of geek paraphernalia. His freelance design credits include *The Grand History of the Realms*™, Forgotten Realms® *Campaign Guide*, *Open Grave: Secrets of the Undead*™, Dragon *Magazine Annual*, *Underdark*™, and *Demonomicon*™. Follow Brian online at twitter.com/brian-rjames or facebook.com/thejamesbrothers.

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# Explore Taer Lian Doresh

## Fortress of Fading Dreams

*by Jeff LaSala ✦ illustration by Sam Burley ✦ cartography by Jared Blando*

Before the Day of Mourning, the Whitepine Forest was a source of quiet, verdant life, a wild frontier with many legends of its own. These ancient tales often featured the fleeting appearance of a mysterious fey city, or merely the glimpse of a single spire of gold in the deep twilight. Today, those who venture too far into the dark woods of the Lhazaar hinterlands discover a very real and very malevolent presence: Taer Lian Doresh, the Fortress of Fading Dreams. Formerly one of the seven shining jewels of Thelanis, now it is a place of living nightmares and waking horror.

**TAER LIAN DORESH**
Situated in the heart of a cold northern forest, Taer Lian Doresh is a feyspire once believed lost to the eladrin for millennia.
**Population:** 4,000; Eladrin make up the vast majority of the population, while varying numbers of banshraes, dryads, gnomes, hags, quicklings, and satyrs make up the minority.
**Government:** Shan Lian Doresh, Lord of the Fading Dream, is the feyspire's lord and king.
**Taverns:** Night's Refuge.

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## Lore

Gnomes or eladrin from one of the other feyspires of Thelanis gain a +2 bonus on Arcana checks to learn about Taer Lian Doresh.

**Arcana DC 20:** Nearly every legend told of the eladrin makes mention of one of the mythic feyspires, the glorious cities of Thelanis, the Feywild. Yet of the seven fabled spires, few tales in the current age speak of Shae Doresh, the Spire of Dreams. When asked of its fate, the eladrin cast their eyes to the ground and grow reticent to speak of the deep past. Shae Doresh has been deemed lost to Thelanis and eladrin both, though whispers of the fey suggest it survives somewhere.

**Arcana DC 25:** Like all the planes, Thelanis drifts within a cosmic cycle of its own; it becomes coterminous with Eberron every 255 years for a period of seven years. Thousands of years before the humans of Sarlona migrated to Khorvaire, the eladrin suffered the loss of one of their feyspires, Shae Tirias Tolai, when it shifted from the plane of Thelanis to the continent of Xen'drik during one such coterminous period. The giants who reigned on Eberron pillaged the tower and enslaved its occupants, forcing the remaining feyspires to bolster their magical defenses. But the lords of Shae Doresh, Spire of Dreams, refused to cower and wait for the next assault. They sought vengeance for their ill-fated kin, spending the duration of the next planar cycle crafting battle spells and armaments of war. Nursing an unforgivable grievance for their people's loss, they rebuilt their citadel into a fortress of destruction and demanded the other feyspires do the same. But the other spires could not be swayed from the defensive stance they believed necessary. At last, when Thelanis became coterminous with Eberron again, the lords of Shae Doresh spoke their challenge.

Alone against the giants, the fey of Shae Doresh had no chance—despite their preparations and their considerable magic. Rather than retaliating with bloodshed alone, the titan king enacted a powerful ritual, casting the entire feyspire into Dal Quor, the Region of Dreams. Exiled beyond their ability to overcome, the inhabitants of the feyspire languished for thousands of years in that oneiric realm. In time, dreams gave way to nightmares: The eladrin host and their allies were transformed into embittered shadows of their former selves. When Dal Quor became coterminous with Thelanis again, the feyspire returned to its ancestral home. But Shae Doresh had already become Taer Lian Doresh, the Fortress of Fading Dreams.

**Arcana DC 30:** The feyspires of Thelanis have been stranded on Eberron since the Day of Mourning, though none know how or why. Taer Lian Doresh is no exception, though its location remains unknown. Rumors claim that the fey of the Fading Dream foster living nightmares within their citadel, turning dark and errant thoughts into substance and unleashing them upon a hated world. Those who have managed to survive encounters with them say that these twisted fey can turn their enemies' fears against them.

The fey of the Fading Dream harbor a secret that they impart only to those who can serve their interests: Taer Lian Doresh now exists on both the material world and in Dal Quor. Dreams may take physical form within its halls, and both residents and visitors alike can interact with the spirits of mortal dreamers. Even the quori, the nightmare denizens of that plane, come and go in the flesh.

## Key Personalities and Groups

Player characters may find themselves entangled in schemes of any of the following individuals or groups, whether within or without the Fortress of Fading Dreams.

### Shan Lian Doresh, Lord of the Fading Dream

The eldest of his kin, Shan Lian Doresh is the archfey warlord who led his people's crusade against the giants thousands of years ago. Arrogant even for an immortal ghaele, he is nevertheless as powerful as the image he projects, commanding not only the martial prowess of the Fading Dream but also the power of nightmares. Brooding in his tower, he studies the world beyond his cloistered city through the dreams of the innocent and unwitting. When it pleases him to do so, he destroys the minds of the weak with terrible visions only a creature of nightmare can endure.

**Vengeance Undying:** Shan Doresh seeks revenge against the fey lords who abandoned his people to their fate long ago. Most of those lords have long since faded, so he seeks to punish their descendants—the eladrin and other peoples of the feyspires. He does not desire their destruction, only well-deserved torment, and he will manipulate heroes, villains, or entire nations toward this end. The characters are more likely to become unknowing tools of Shan Doresh's revenge than targets of his wrath. Elves, gnomes, and especially other eladrin—all of whom can trace their ancestry to Thelanis—are sure to be snared within his intricate plots.

**Unswerving Terror:** An order of loyal warriors, the Knights of Terror, attend Shan Doresh on all military matters and sow fear among his enemies. Each of the seven embodies a primal fear of the mortal world: death, failure, isolation, pain, vulnerability, remorse, or the unknown. The Knights usually remain in their lord's court, but some ride on errands across Khorvaire, leaving calamities in their wake. The characters might catch wind of the Fading Dream through the actions of one of these dread cavaliers.

## Santyriana, Mistress of the Shroud

A creature of calculating atrocity and detached malice, Santyriana is the most powerful night hag in service to Shan Lian Doresh. She defers her will to him out of admiration, envy, and an unsavory lust. She spends time abroad within Dal Quor, acting as an emissary on behalf of the Fading Dream. She is even personally acquainted with—and mutually despises—the night hag Kyrale, ambassador to the fiends of the Demon Wastes. She leads the council known as the Shrouded Sages.

**The Stuff of Nightmares:** Santyriana maintains a larder of subjects for her own amusement, often tapping the resources of Taer Lian Doresh to seek out choice mortals from beyond its walls. During the day, she keeps her victims comfortable and reasonably content, even prompting her more pleasing servants to "befriend" them. At night she *becomes* their nightmares in the flesh and tastes of their terror, devouring them only when madness has stripped them of fear—but not pain. Having gathered victims from among Khorvaire's populous races, Santyriana will pay special interest to any characters of unusual heritage who fall under the influence of the Fading Dream. Though she can haunt the dreams of any mortals whose nightmares bring them to her doorstep, she ultimately craves flesh and bone.

## The Paranymph, Bridesmaid of Souls

The creature known only as the Paranymph is responsible for establishing, managing, or dissolving any and all pacts made with warlocks. When a mortal forges a pact with the Shan Lian Doresh, he weds his soul to the power of the Fading Dream in exchange for unearthly magic. In that spiritual marriage, the Paranymph is the sole bridesmaid, attending the ritual and serving as a spokeswoman for the fey. Robed and cowled at all times in slithering, overlong garments of white or black (never both at once), only her mouth and delicate feminine hands are ever seen. She speaks in whispers or screams, never in moderate tones. Not even the other fey can recall precisely what she used to be. Some suspect she was a water nymph before Shae Doresh was exiled to Dal Quor. Others say she was an eladrin princess betrothed to a lord of Shae Tirias Tolai before giants razed it. Whatever her past, the Paranymph is now the mouth for the collective spirit of the Fading Dream and its master.

**Eager Pacts:** The characters are likely to encounter the Paranymph in their dreams long before they ever meet her in person. Generally speaking, one simply does not seek out the nightmare fey; one must be approached, and it is the Paranymph who makes the final offer. Existing warlocks bonded to the Fading Dream act as recruiters in the wider world. When someone of interest is found, the warlock notifies the Paranymph.

**Epic Tragedy:** While mostly evil warlocks are likely to become willing agents of the Fading Dream, the fey take pleasure in spreading sorrow far outside their immediate domain. Good or unaligned warlocks might enter into a pact unwittingly or simply because they are misinformed. If the Paranymph forges a pact with a warlock character, she either believes his actions will advance the agenda of the Fading Dream or that the pact will seed in him a delicious tragedy she hopes to one day harvest.

### Taer Lian Doresh in Your Campaign

The Fortress of Fading Dreams is a nightmarish, forbidding city far removed from civilized lands. If the characters need to recover a legendary artifact or lost ritual scroll, the Fortress would serve as an ideal place for its keeping. These evil fey keep many secrets and are willing to bargain peaceably if it serves their purpose in the long run. Yet characters will not likely draw the full notice of the Fading Dream until they've reached the paragon tier. By 11th level, the adventures they've experienced may have warranted enough physical and mental anguish to inspire the types of nightmares that the fey of Taer Lian Doresh savor. In Eberron, characters who have battled the Inspired, cults of the Dragon Below, or the Lords of Dust are the most likely to encounter an agent of the Fading Dream. Such an agent will try to enter into the characters' association with a mask of civility, perhaps by "representing a benefactor of means who wishes to remain nameless at this time." If she insinuates herself into their confidence during the heroic tier, she will attempt to draw them back to Taer Lian Doresh during the paragon tier . . . when their nightmares are ripest.

## The Dreaming Dark

Due to magic enacted during the Age of Giants, most ties between Eberron and Dal Quor have long been severed. Taer Lian Doresh is not a true bridge between the waking world and the Region of Dreams. It overlaps and exists on both planes, but whenever a creature from either exits the feyspire, it returns to its plane of entry. In this way, quori cannot venture beyond the bounds of the citadel into Eberron proper, and denizens of Eberron cannot pass fully into Dal Quor. Yet Taer Lian Doresh still provides a unique opportunity for the Dreaming Dark. The quori have taken keen interest in the feyspire's unique position and regularly negotiate with Shan Doresh and his diplomats for its use.

**Enemies Within:** Kalashtar characters or any other servants of *il-Yannah* who have proven a nuisance to the Dreaming Dark may find themselves invited by the fey to visit Taer Lian Doresh, unaware that the quori have "hired" them to do so. What may seem a unique opportunity to interact with the lords of a lost feyspire might, in fact, be a trap. In exchange for unknown services, the eladrin are merely delivering them into nightmarish hands. As terrifying as the quori are in dreams, their manifestation in the flesh is far worse.

### Reaching the Fortress

There are two ways to make contact with Taer Lian Doresh: in your dreams or in person. Whenever someone dreams, his or her spirit touches the plane of Dal Quor, where Taer Lian Doresh exists as well. Some individuals might stray accidentally during such nocturnal wanderings into the domain of these vengeful fey, or agents—or enemies—of the Fading Dream might deliberately draw them there. Alternatively, one may try to physically locate the feyspire. Situated east of the mighty Hoarfrost Mountains and hidden in the heart of the cold Whitepine Forest, the Fortress of Fading Dreams is not easily accessible. No roads lead to it. A Lhazaar ranger intimately familiar with the forest or a character trained in Nature could possibly find the way if he or she knows what to look for, but such a journey has many dangers. If the fey of the Fading Dream want to be found, that's another story—subtle trails and telltale landmarks may appear to pave the way. Those who have been told of the Fortress's location will find the easiest access point by entering the mainland from Mutiny Bay in the Lhazaar Sea.

## The Shrouded Sages

Governed by Santyriana, the Shrouded Sages are a cabal of mystics who regularly part the veil between planes to discern patterns and prophecies that can be exploited by the Fading Dream. They sift through relics and lore gathered from the world outside, either from equipment their victims carry or in dreams they harbor. Each Sage wears long, dark robes made ragged by centuries of nightmares, while deep hoods conceal their faces. Most appear to be eladrin, but a disturbing handful are smaller in size, suggesting the bodies of gnomes or eladrin children.

**Avaricious Acquisition:** The Shrouded Sages excel at giving substance to the imagined. When they have identified a mortal whose dreams they wish to cultivate, they arrange for one of their agents to seek that individual out in the wider world and bring them to Taer Lian Doresh in person. Within the citadel, the victim's nightmares can materialize fully and be shackled for the Fading Dream's own purposes.

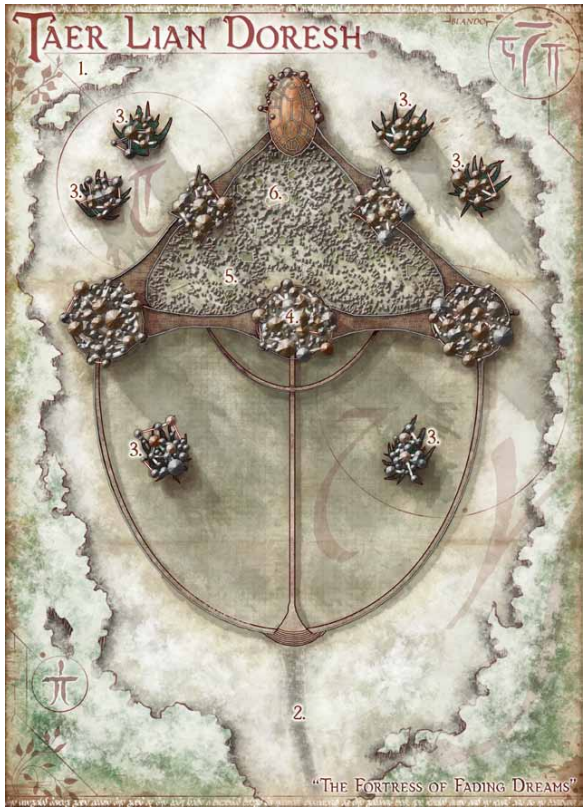
**Philters of Fear:** The Sages brew a draught specially designed to incite nightmares. Drinking this otherwise innocuous solution draws the spirit of a dreamer to Taer Lian Doresh the next time he or she sleeps. In this way, the fey can communicate with prospective allies and victims. Such draughts are supplied to agents of the Fading Dream specifically for this use. More than one courtier or diplomat from the Five Nations has been interrogated by Shan Lian Doresh himself in this way—only to awaken hours later in bed, sweat-soaked and terrified. In most cases, the subject is made to forget the dream, recalling only shreds of a nightmare that he or she would rather not think about.

# Locations

Taer Lian Doresh is a place like no other. Existing on both Dal Quor and Eberron, it is a city in constant psychic flux. At the core, its majestic, curving architecture and elegant design remains fixed, but no two visitors—be they intruders or guests—perceive it the same way. From within or without, the Fortress takes on an unsettling aspect, reflecting the fears and nightmares of its viewer. Within, reality and even the rules of magic behave in unpredictable ways, subject to the erratic will of the Region of Dreams.

## 1. The Whitepine Forest

Seen from above, the Whitepine Forest is pale in hue. The needles of its lush evergreens are the color of jade, and mist clings to the canopy long after dawn. Dusted with snow for the better part of each year, the woods evoke a sense of cold serenity and wondrous beauty. But so dense is the Whitepine that travelers find it exceptionally dark even in daylight hours.




Without a guide or a keen awareness, it's easy to become lost.

**Wailing Spirits:** The woods immediately surrounding Taer Lian Doresh are haunted by ghosts risen from the victims of the feyspire—usually those who intruded uninvited or were hunted down by the vindictive fey. Banshees are common among them, filling the lonely hollows with their anguished cries. Most express their rage by attacking any living intruder they encounter, while a rare few actually try to warn away adventurers so that they do not suffer the same fate.

**Walls of Steam:** The region in which Taer Lian Doresh now resides is scattered with warm natural springs and volatile geysers that keep the colder temperatures at bay. From above, the feyspire is concealed by perpetually rising steam. In fact, the seething mists immediately encircling the glade mark the border between planes, where Dal Quor bleeds into the waking world.

## 2. The Approach

Though Taer Lian Doresh was reconstructed thousands of years ago into an engine of war, the lofty towers of this dark citadel are still beautiful to behold—at least initially. Like the worst of nightmares, what begins as pleasing to the eye gradually shifts into something disquieting.

**Misdirection:** As in dreams, a visitor's sense of direction in the Fortress is permanently upset. There is no north or south; no matter which direction a visitor approaches the city, they face the "front" of the feyspire at all times. Circling around the glade to approach from another direction, even in separate groups, is futile. Intruders will arrive at precisely the same place.

**The Soughing Bridge:** A high wall forms the perimeter of a great pool, serving the host as both reservoir and moat. The pool contains whatever an intruder fears or whatever Shan Lian Doresh requires: fouled water, corrosive acid, a miasma of poisonous fumes, or even a gaping chasm. Whatever horror one perceives is phantasmal in nature but *can* kill, if one isn't careful. On Shan Doresh's whim, the pool can also harden into a plain of polished mirror, allowing his army an easy exit. A narrow bridge of black marble spans the reservoir, where apparitions inspired by a visitor's regrets take incorporeal shape and murmur their anguish.

## 3. Trees of Sentinel

When the eladrin prepared their citadel for war against the giants, six mighty trees were shaped into defensible forts, then transmuted into iron. Dal Quor has since transformed these trees into mockeries of their former selves, jagged stumps bereft of branches or leaves. Balconies, windows, and arrow slits—carved from the living wood before the transmutation—look down upon the city proper beneath the sharp remnants of great iron trunks. Dryads of the Fading Dream lurk within these angular forts, while eladrin archers regularly watch from the windows.

## 4. Towers

Six great towers, each crowned with narrow spires and domed turrets, rise above the city proper. Seen from afar, some visitors perceive them as colossal furnaces, spewing foul smoke into the sky, while others see great columns of bone weeping vile fluid or melting like mountainous candles. Such visions, born of one's own darker mind, may be tentatively held at bay for those who are expected, but even they find the citadel's appearance ultimately disturbing. At their most pleasing, the halls of Taer Lian Doresh still seem not quite *right*, like a sinister face hidden behind a mask of gallantry. Everywhere one looks there seems a shadowed alcove, a drawn curtain, or a door left slightly ajar, daring and dreading to be examined. Depending upon which balcony or window one looks out from, one may see the singular landscape of Dal Quor or a misty panorama of the Whitepine Forest.

**Feverish Flux:** Many places throughout the city include intermittent squares of fantastic terrain such as mirror crystal, slides, eldritch influxes, and phase mist. If there is a particular terrain type that characters fear or anticipate, it is likely they will find it before long merely by thinking about it.

## 5. Grottoes and Groves

Between the greater towers of the feyspire lies an array of smaller structures, fey domiciles, pathways, and gardens. Once well-ordered and aesthetic, this part of the city is now a labyrinth of winding tunnels, savage groves, and buildings that look more like mausoleums than homes. Some eladrin live in this district, but mostly the other fey races make their abodes here. Gnomes dwell in half-buried grottoes, while dryads and banshraes lair among twisted trees and razorlike vines. Galleries of shattered stone and empty plazas bereft of any semblance of flora break up this tangled region. More than one coven of hags vies for territory among the ruins, while quickling errand-runners and satyr heralds rove between this district and the greater towers. An assortment of beasts—some previously unseen in Eberron—have been bred here. Many of these pets remain caged, while others prowl freely and sometimes wander far from Taer Lian Doresh.

**The Battle Breeder:** A blind cyclops, the only one of his kind to have served Shae Doresh before its long disappearance, dwells in a warren of volcanic rock somewhere beneath the groves. Known only as Sammet the Eyeshot, he is a wrangler of battlebriars and a stablemaster for the Fading Dream's finest mounts. Although his first instinct is to use the bones of intruders to armor his beasts, Sammet can be mollified with tales of wonders seen or offers of exotic specimens for his menagerie.

## 6. Night's Refuge

Situated in the heart of the city is Night's Refuge, a wide courtyard of tables, chairs, and leafy arbors. Under the open sky (of both Eberron and Dal Quor), this former hippodrome has been converted into a place of gathering, where even food and drink are sold by fey merchants and eerie music drifts through the air like vapor. By Shan Doresh's mysterious decree, none may be harmed at Night's Refuge. It is the feyspire's sole place of sanctuary, existing under a law even dumb beasts in service to the fey recognize. If the characters can make their way to this surreal area, they can find rest and relief from the living nightmares of Taer Lian Doresh. If they have made enemies within the feyspire, they can conceivably share a drink with them here without threat of attack—provided *they* abide by the state of truce. Some wayward intruders, and even spirits of dreamers, have become too afraid to leave the Refuge ever again. For them, it is both sanctuary and prison.

## Wyrds

Shan Doresh himself has termed his subjects *wyrds*—"the fated"—and believes that the only redemption the eladrin race deserves is a similar transformation. The term wyrd refers to any creature with the fey origin that has been gradually transformed by the dream world of Dal Quor into a nightmarish version of its former self. Every fey occupant of Taer Lian Doresh has been changed in this fashion.

A wyrd is effectively immortal, but does not gain the immortal origin. It gains one new power and the following characteristics:

**Senses** Low-light vision
**Immune** fear
**Resist** 5 psychic

The creature gains the *dark step* power. If it has *fey step*, *dark step* replaces *fey step*.

**Dark Step** (move; encounter) ✦ **Teleportation**
The wyrd teleports 5 squares and gains a +2 bonus to all defenses until the end of its next turn.

### *About the Author*

Jeff LaSala is a writer of speculative fiction and an artificer of RPGs. His Eberron novel, *The Darkwood Mask*, was nominated for the Scribe Award and showcases his love for all things dark, monstrous, and masked. Many of his ideas are drawn from the cthonic depths of New York City, where he (roll 1d4)... (1) Dwells with an Argentine mermaid—and even married her; (2) Masquerades as a normal person; (3) Imagines a world splintered into sorry hemispheres; (4) Lurks like a gargoyle over his website: ashlock.org.

*The deadly primordials have all been slain, caged, diminished, shattered, or otherwise warded away from the world. Balcoth, the Groaning King, is one such primordial, but he is unlikely to remain so bound for long. The Dawn War ended with his severed head immured in a dungeon for all time, but his mastery of arcane mysteries sustains him and calls allies and servants to serve his pursuit of freedom. As his power grows, he becomes more likely to reunite with his body—raging headless through the Elemental Chaos—and reclaim his seat of power.*

# Lords of Chaos: Balcoth, the Groaning King

*By Peter Schaefer*

*illustration by Eric Belisle*

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During the Dawn War, Balcoth remained behind the front lines. The battle of steel and divine power against flame, ice, and lightning did not entice him from his sanctum, even though his fire titan heritage cried out to burn the divine upstarts to ash. He had ascended to his position of might by pursuing arcane spells and rituals, and Balcoth supported his primordial allies with vast rituals that concealed their weaknesses and strengths and rewrote swaths of reality. His magic provided escapes for many hard-pressed primordials and ensured the death of many gods whose names are now forgotten—giving Balcoth the chance to steal their knowledge and magic.

As Balcoth's role in the Dawn War became known, the gods sought his death. Balcoth sought safety and anonymity, even as his arcane might grew to the point where reality warped and groaned where he walked. He manipulated his peers to capture a fledgling god of shadows and secrets, and from that god's flesh Balcoth fashioned a black mask. Balcoth's mask obscured the shifting flames and scoria of his face, and its magic concealed him from mundane and magical sight.

His safety assured, Balcoth resumed pursuing his joys: acquiring further spells and rituals, and exploring the boundaries of the mortal mind. This second pleasure he discovered after the birth of the mortal races. He found the races' malleability and impressionability fascinating.

Balcoth tested minds in every way imaginable, inducing every emotion and savoring the experience. He created magical diseases of the mind; a favorite pastime involved exposing an individual to his newest creation until he fully understood the effect the new disease had on the creature's mind, at which point he would either break the individual with a word or spend great lengths reshaping it to his whim. More than once he applied the same techniques to entire cultures, discovering a mindset unique to a given people so he could destroy whole nations or races at once, or drive every member of a culture mad over a short time.

This fascination with mortals' minds became Balcoth's undoing. Since the gods could not find him, they created a lure for him, a hardy-minded race he had never examined. In the time it took Balcoth to drive every member of the young race irrevocably mad, the gods were upon him. The battle was swift: Bane severed Balcoth's head, Moradin formed a dungeon to imprison it, and Bahamut peopled the prison with followers to stand guard.

But such was Balcoth's immense power that neither his body nor his head died. Rituals performed before the trap was sprung ensured that death would not be his fate. His body now rampages, mindlessly destructive, through the Elemental Chaos. Balcoth's head sits impatiently at the bottom of a lost dungeon somewhere in the mortal realm. His jailers have gone. The mortals sworn to guard it are dead or betrayed, and Balcoth's angelic guards have moved to more important posts. Only a maze of traps, tireless automatons, and conjurations stand between a loyal follower of Balcoth and the primordial himself.

And Balcoth is not without power. When he is calm, he reaches out to find minds he can sway with his magic to set his plans in motion. When his rage takes him, he bellows and screams, shaking the earth and giving children nightmares for hundreds of miles in every direction.

His influence in the mortal world is subtle. Some of the cults devoted to him during the Dawn War remain today, led by Balcoth's most fanatical followers. These rare individuals have been gifted by the Groaning King with a form of magical self-preservation that enables them to carry out his work. Many have calcified over the eons, but Balcoth will free them when the time is right.

## Balcoth Hooks

- Many of the inhabitants in a confederacy of villages have been unable to sleep restfully for at least a month. Each affected individual has shared a similar story—a nightmare of a severed head whispering barely heard threats and entreaties. The characters can eliminate the nightmares by strengthening the wards on the first level of Balcoth's prison to keep his psychic emanations from leaking to the surrounding area.
- A dwarf historian believes a lost relic of her clan was left behind when Moradin's followers left Balcoth's prison. She needs help retrieving it from the middle levels.
- The heroes happen upon a trap left behind by Balcoth: a mirror that duplicates creatures reflected in it, but with devotion to Balcoth their sole concern. The characters must stop their duplicates from freeing Balcoth.

**Balcoth's Head** **Level 23 Solo Controller**
Medium elemental humanoid (primordial) XP 25,500

**Initiative** see ritual knowledge **Senses** Perception +26; darkvision
**Unstable Reality** (**Teleportation**) aura 2; Balcoth can teleport any creature that ends its turn within the aura 5 squares. When he does, he can also deal 5 damage to that creature, or 10 damage if Balcoth is bloodied.
**HP** 856; **Bloodied** 428
**AC** 37; **Fortitude** 35, **Reflex** 33, **Will** 37
**Immune** fire; **Resist** half damage from close and area attacks
**Saving Throws** +5; whenever an attack applies an effect to Balcoth that a save can end, he makes an immediate saving throw. If it succeeds, Balcoth is unaffected by the effect. Balcoth makes saving throws at the end of each of his turns as normal.
**Speed** 0, fly 1 (hover), teleport 4
**Action Points** 2

**Forceful Gaze** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Force**
Reach 2 or Ranged 10; +26 vs. Reflex; 2d10 + 9 force damage, and Balcoth pushes the target 10 squares.

**Word of Dissolution** (standard; recharge ⚄ ⚅)
Ranged 20; +26 vs. Fortitude; 1d10 + 6 damage, and the target takes ongoing 10 damage (save ends). *First Failed Save:* The target instead takes ongoing 20 damage (save ends). *Second Failed Save:* The target is reduced to 0 hit points.

**Arcane Censure** (minor; recharges when first bloodied)
Close burst 3; targets enemies; +26 vs. Fortitude; the target is restrained (save ends). *First Failed Save:* The target is instead removed from play (save ends). When this effect ends, the target returns in a square of his or her choice within 5 squares of Balcoth.

**Manifold Self** (free, when Balcoth's head starts its turn; there must be fewer than 3 Balcoth's heads in play; at-will)
Balcoth duplicates himself until there are three Balcoth's heads in play. When Balcoth creates a new duplicate, it appears within 5 squares of him. One duplicate acts on an initiative count equal to Balcoth's - 5, and the other on Balcoth's initiative count - 10. Balcoth's head and its duplicates have identical statistics, share the same pool of hit points and powers, but each gets a full set of actions. When Balcoth takes damage while more than one duplicate is present, the duplicate that took the damage is destroyed.

**Ritual Knowledge**
Balcoth is warned of danger. His initiative check result in any combat is equal to the highest rolled result + 5.

**Alignment** Chaotic evil **Languages** All
**Skills** Arcana +27, Diplomacy +31, Insight +31
**Str** 20 (+16) **Dex** 16 (+14) **Wis** 29 (+21)
**Con** 22 (+17) **Int** 33 (+22) **Cha** 28 (+21)

**Balcoth's Corpus** **Level 25 Solo Brute**
Huge elemental humanoid (blind, primordial) XP 35,000

**Initiative** +19 **Senses** Perception +14; blindsight 20
**Titanic Heat** (**Fire**) aura 5; any enemy that starts its turn in the aura takes 10 fire damage.
**HP** 952; **Bloodied** 476
**AC** 39; **Fortitude** 39, **Reflex** 35, **Will** 37
**Immune** fear, fire; **Vulnerable** cold (Balcoth's corpus's speed is 4 until the end of its next turn)
**Saving Throws** +5
**Speed** 8 (cannot shift)
**Action Points** 2

**Smash** (standard; at-will)
Reach 3; +28 vs. AC; 3d10 + 9 damage, and Balcoth pushes the target 3 squares and knocks the target prone.

**Hurled Magma** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Fire**
Ranged 20; +26 vs. Reflex; 3d12 + 7 fire damage (crit 43 damage and the target is immobilized until the end of Balcoth's next turn).

**Stomp** (minor 1/round; at-will)
Reach 2; +28 vs. AC; 2d10 + 10 damage, plus 2d10 extra damage against a prone target.

**Trample** (standard; at-will)
Balcoth's corpus moves its speed and can move through enemies' spaces. It makes a stomp attack against any two enemies whose space it enters for the first time during this move, and then makes a *smash* or *hurled magma* attack after moving.

**Magma Burst** (standard; recharge ⚄ ⚅) ✦ **Fire**
Close burst 5; +26 vs. Reflex; 4d8 + 10 fire damage plus ongoing 20 fire damage (save ends). *First Failed Save:* The target is also restrained (save ends).

**Provoked Backhand** (immediate reaction, when an enemy hits Balcoth with a melee attack; recharges when first bloodied)
Reach 3; targets triggering enemy; +28 vs. AC; 4d10 + 10 damage, and the target is knocked prone.

**Mindless Rage** (while bloodied)
Balcoth's corpus deals 5 extra damage with every attack.

**Alignment** Chaotic evil **Languages** –
**Skills** Athletics +28, Endurance +27
**Str** 33 (+23) **Dex** 24 (+19) **Wis** 14 (+14)
**Con** 30 (+22) **Int** 3 (+8) **Cha** 6 (+9)

## Description

Balcoth's head, as large as a man, sits on a stone pedestal in a stone chamber. His face is the black of just-cooled lava covered with cracks that appear as if magma is threatening to break through. His obsidian eyes gleam with intelligence. Lava drips from his head in thick rivulets resembling hair, disappearing before they hit the floor. Space and distances around him bend and twist unexpectedly.

## Balcoth's Head Tactics

Balcoth's head always prefers to avoid conflict, given his trapped state, but when his life is threatened, he takes action. He considers other spellcasters the greatest threats, so he focuses his attacks on them unless another enemy proves more dangerous. Balcoth's calm side seems to always assert itself in combat, and he is always willing to negotiate. He often continues to make offers to his enemies as they fight–a fight that ends in agreement is more profitable to all involved, and Balcoth has several rituals that apply nasty side effects to broken oaths.

## Description

Balcoth's titanic body is the red and black of a just-cooled lava flow, and seeps with dribbles of lava, especially when wounded. Though headless, it has an uncanny awareness of everything around it.

## Balcoth's Corpus Tactics

Without the calming influence of its mind, Balcoth's body knows only pain and rage. It enters battle directly, smashing and stomping everyone nearby not firmly established as an ally.

## Description

With his head and body joined, Balcoth is a paragon of fire titan power and form. When Balcoth wears his mask, it covers his head with a cloth woven of black so dark as to seem like a void in space, and it covers his face with a smooth ivory sheen. His eyes and mouth are also covered with the darkness that enshrouds his head, and no sight can pierce the shadows to make out what is behind them.

## Balcoth's Tactics

Balcoth would rather make compacts than destroy creatures that might become allies or tools. He does not hesitate to offer alliances or servitude as he tears enemies apart. His preferred weapon is magic, and he seeks to deprive enemies of the same, but his titanic strength is an advantage he recognizes and wields. If equipped with his fabled mask, Balcoth becomes an even more fearsome foe.

**Balcoth, the Groaning King** **Level 33 Solo Controller**
Huge elemental humanoid (primordial) XP 155,000

**Initiative** see ritual knowledge **Senses** Perception +30; darkvision

**Unstable Reality (Teleportation)** aura 2; Balcoth can teleport any creature that ends its turn within the aura 5 squares. When he does, he can also deal 10 damage to that creature, or 15 damage if Balcoth is bloodied.

**Titanic Heat (Fire)** aura 5; any enemy that starts its turn in the aura takes 10 fire damage.

**HP** 1,208; **Bloodied** 604

**AC** 47; **Fortitude** 46, **Reflex** 43, **Will** 46

**Immune** fire; **Resist** half damage from close and area attacks

**Saving Throws** +5; whenever an attack applies an effect to Balcoth that a save can end, he makes an immediate saving throw. If it succeeds, Balcoth is unaffected by the effect. Balcoth makes saving throws at the end of each of its turns as normal.

**Speed** 8, teleport 4

**Action Points** 2

**Smash** (standard; at-will)
Reach 3; +38 vs. AC; 2d12 + 12 damage, and Balcoth pushes the target 3 squares and knocks the target prone.

**Forceful Gaze** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Force**
Reach 2 or Ranged 10; +36 vs. Reflex; 2d10 + 14 force damage, and Balcoth pushes the target 10 squares.

**Word of Dissolution** (standard; at-will)
Ranged 20; +36 vs. Fortitude; 2d10 + 4 damage, and the target takes ongoing 10 damage (save ends). *First Failed Save:* The target instead takes ongoing 20 damage (save ends). *Second Failed Save:* The target is reduced to 0 hit points.

**Provoked Backhand** (immediate reaction, when an enemy hits Balcoth with a melee attack; recharge when first bloodied)
Reach 3; targets triggering enemy; +38 vs. AC; 2d12 + 12 damage, and the target is knocked prone.

**Forbidding Shout** (standard; recharge ⚄ ⚅) ✦ **Psychic**
Close burst 5; targets enemies; +36 vs. Will; 6d6 + 9 damage, and the target cannot teleport (save ends).

**Manifold Self** (free, when Balcoth starts his turn; there must be fewer than 3 Balcoths in play; at-will)
Balcoth duplicates himself until there are three Balcoths in play. When Balcoth creates a new duplicate, it appears within 5 squares of him. One duplicate acts on an initiative count equal to Balcoth's - 5, and the other on Balcoth's initiative count - 10. Balcoth and his duplicates have identical statistics, share the same pool of hit points and powers, but each gets a full set of actions. When Balcoth takes damage while more than one duplicate is present, the duplicate that took the damage is destroyed.

**Ritual Knowledge**
Balcoth is warned of danger. His initiative check result in any combat is equal to the highest rolled result + 5.

**Alignment** Chaotic evil **Languages** All
**Skills** Arcana +32, Diplomacy +35, Insight +35
**Str** 33 (+27) **Dex** 24 (+23) **Wis** 29 (+25)
**Con** 30 (+26) **Int** 33 (+27) **Cha** 28 (+25)

## Balcoth's Servants

Before and during the Dawn War, the Groaning King had many followers spread among many different cults. They served him ardently for several reasons, but primary among them was that Balcoth was skilled at offering rewards that pleased him as much as the obvious beneficiary. Second, the primordial's mastery in understanding and manipulating the mortal mind made millions of simpler intellects his to command. One of Balcoth's games was to see how quickly he could trigger blind devotion in someone who previously had no interest in joining one of his cults.

Of Balcoth's cults, only scant vestiges of a few survive today. Those that remain are those that concealed themselves best when their master was cast down.

### Statuary of the Groaning Vaults

While his peers warred against the deities, Balcoth buried himself in the arcane research that gave him pleasure. To justify his activities to other primordials and prevent them from turning on him, he devoted much of his time to creating items of great magic to help defeat the gods, including the Chariot of Balcoth, which could travel over any obstacle, and a sky-worm that devoured angels. To store his creations while they were not in use, he formed the Groaning Vaults deep within the tallest mountain of the highest mountain range in the world. To protect his treasures from intruders and keep them ready for champions of the primordials to wield against the gods, he founded the Statuary of the Groaning Vaults.

The Statuary consists of several thousand devout worshipers of Balcoth who have been granted the glorious opportunity to remain in contemplation of his majesty. Balcoth wove a great ritual such that any follower within the vault who held no thought in mind but Balcoth's greatness would be granted limited petrification: The servant would not age and could not act, but was aware and could continue to mentally contemplate Balcoth. Some in the Groaning Vaults failed to achieve single-minded adoration and died, but most succeeded in joining the Statuary.

Balcoth appointed a nameless rakshasa the leader of the Statuary of the Groaning Vaults. He gave his devoted follower a persistent awareness of all the Vaults and the ability to release members of the Statuary, all selected for their skill in wielding weapons or magic, to combat intrusion.

Today, the Statuary's numbers have dwindled through lack of devotion, but those that remain amid the Groaning Vaults' magical defenses still make looting the contents a dangerous proposition.

#### Statuary Hooks

- Tasked with facing immortal enemies, the heroes must steal or barter weapons from the Groaning Vaults of Balcoth, bringing the adventurers into conflict with the Statuary.
- Members of the Statuary have been freed from their stone slumber to hunt and retrieve the Chariot of Balcoth, which has been stolen. This goal might align with that of the characters, or perhaps the characters are allied with the thieves, putting them at odds with the members of the Statuary.
- To replenish the Statuary's numbers, the rakshasa is recruiting new members. Not all his recruiting involves willing applicants, and some people inevitably vanish whenever he leaves a region.

### Vessels of Lore

Balcoth's greatest joy was learning a new piece of arcane lore or mastering a new ritual. His Vessels of Lore were clever, perceptive mortals who shared that joy—or who were suited to the task and made to consider his pleasure theirs—and who trawled the world for knowledge desirable to Balcoth, procuring it for him at any cost.

Each vessel received a mind-altering enchantment, giving the individual a subliminal understanding of the particular information Balcoth craved. Thus equipped, the vessel could make accurate decisions about which information to study and learn, and that learning process passed the knowledge to Balcoth. The alteration of the mind also included the subconscious mastery of a ritual to imbue another person as a vessel of lore. This was Balcoth's attempt to extend his line of servants into perpetuity.

The second of these rituals was not always successful, and not every vessel managed to recruit even one additional member before being taken by death. Even with the ambitious starting pool of tens of thousands of mortals, few remain alive today. Most of these are historians, scholars, and researchers of ancient and esoteric lore. Some are high-ranking priests of Ioun or cultists of Vecna, using their positions to fill the unending itch to acquire rare knowledge.

Bits of lore now cast toward Balcoth by a vessel of lore no longer reach him. In the beginning, Balcoth immediately perceived information learned by any vessel, knowledge and understanding both occurring in the same instant. Balcoth shed that link for his safety—his mask prevented the knowledge from finding him—so he passed the responsibility on to Magoriel, who absorbed the knowledge and shared it with Balcoth in a more secure fashion.

Magoriel is an archangel of Vecna, as well as a careful and patient traitor. His love of magic rivals that of his god's, and he was enticed to collude with Balcoth during the Dawn War. The Vessels of Lore were as much his creation as Balcoth's, and he still grants them visitations and guidance every few decades. With knowledge of the rituals required for their creation, he began a new line of vessels a century ago when he feared they would die out.

### Vessels of Lore Hooks

- A high priest of Vecna is willing to grant the heroes information they need if they root out the traitor who has been plaguing them. A vessel of lore is the culprit, covertly assisted by Magoriel.
- The characters learn the most interesting things, and Magoriel wants to hitch his cart to their wagon. Through an intermediary, Magoriel asks a studious character to voluntarily become a vessel. The rewards Magoriel offers are great, but the characters might feel compelled to learn more before sealing the deal. After the imbuement, should it take place, Magoriel can point the characters toward numerous sources of interesting information.

## Arcane Cache

Arguably Balcoth's most arrogant experiment, arcane caches are mortals he imbued with an overabundance of arcane energy as a reserve for himself. During the Dawn War, the arcane caches were the blindly devoted who offered their souls as arcane fuel for Balcoth's endeavors. He used their energy and cast aside their husks, disappointed that the mortal form offered so little energy for direct use.

That disappointment led to an experiment that changed the bloodlines of an entire cross section of mortals: the Arcane Cache. The children of the changed persons, and their grandchildren, and so on for all time, brim with arcane energy. An arcanist of this bloodline could tap this power for a burst of energy, but at great personal cost. Often, the release of this energy resulted in the arcane cache's own death. Few of these individuals know of their genealogy, and even fewer are cultists of Balcoth or even aware of the primordial's existence. Also rare are those who know that the arcane caches exist or the secrets of their bloodlines or origins.

Other notable effects of the alteration are that arcane caches cannot wield magic—Balcoth did not want them discovering their own power—and that they tend to seek out people who can. Their nature draws them to people who use what the caches cannot access. Should Balcoth escape from his prison, the presence of arcane caches would help his ascent back to power considerably. Bloodlines of arcane caches exist across the world, and arcane caches themselves number in the thousands, more than any other remnant of Balcoth's cults.

### Arcane Cache Hooks

- An ambitious sorcerer who married into an arcane cache bloodline has discovered his family's secret. His fanatically loyal sons, also aware of their ancestry, have massive extended families so they can provide their father with propulsion for his rise to power.
- Three arcane cache families have been drawn to Balcoth's prison, where they have founded a community. The primordial has begun siphoning away their arcane energy to empower his escape.
- One of the characters is an arcane cache, and attracts the attention of wizards who want to study him or use his stored energy, as well as cultists of Balcoth who want to deliver him to their master.

### *About the Author*

**Peter Schaefer** is a challenge to explain. It is analogous to the blind men and the elephant: no one person sees enough of Peter Schaefer to truly describe him. One person says Peter is a nerd. Another person calls him a scientist's mind with a child's perspective. Some say Peter works as an RPG developer on such books as *Adventurer's Vault 2*, the *Plane Below*, and *Player's Handbook 3*, in addition to numerous D&DI articles. Others describe him as like a rope or a snake. Such folk see only one side of a thing.

# Bestiary: Monsters of Mythology

*By Bruce R. Cordell*

*illustration by William O'Connor*

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*Creatures of classical myth are almost by definition those introduced through oral histories or epic stories of the ancient world. Tales of these monsters, the heroes who fought them, and the supernatural beings who provided aid or hindrance (according to often mercurial natures) reach back thousands of years. These legends are among the oldest monster stories that exist. Some even have constellations named for them*

At least, such is one of the conceits of the original *Clash of the Titans* movie.

*Clash of the Titans* is a 1981 fantasy adventure film based on the myth of Perseus. It proved to be the eleventh highest-grossing film that year, and the film industry has decided to try its hand at the storyline again in hopes of striking movie-making magic once more.

In this retelling, Perseus is "born of a god but raised as a man." During the course of the story, he faces many terrifying threats of the ancient world, creatures that have become firmly established in popular imagination.

We've already seen Dungeons & Dragons® versions of these mythical creatures, even before the original movie. However, this latest reenactment of Perseus's legend gives us the opportunity to provide you some suitably over-the-top versions of some long-time favorites for use in your D&D game.

## Hag

These fey creatures are secret-hoarders and doomsayers. They trade their knowledge for power, influence, and even more secrets, but they are also known for their treachery. If they think for a moment that they could best a petitioner who comes seeking knowledge, then all courtesy dries up. As much as hags enjoy collecting secrets, they also enjoy dining on succulent mortal flesh.

### Lore

**Arcana 31:** Some of the secrets hags learn are gained directly from divine sources, usually through intermediaries, but sometimes after the hag meets directly with an angel, avatar, or other herald of a devious god. Good gods rarely treat with hags, disliking their mercurial natures, though sometimes it is the hag that has information that divine beings must seek.

| **Stygian Hag** | **Level 15 Lurker (Leader)** |
|---|---|
| Medium fey humanoid | XP 1,200 |
| **Initiative** +17 | **Senses** Perception +13; darkvision |
| **Hag's Cackle** aura 1; enemies who end their turns in the aura are slowed (save ends). | |
| **HP** 116; Bloodied 58 | |
| **AC** 29, **Fortitude** 27, **Reflex** 28, **Will** 28 | |
| **Speed** 6 | |
| **Staff** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon** | |
| +20 vs. AC; 2d6 + 5 damage. | |
| **Hag's Lies** (standard; usable while the hag is invisible; at-will) ✦ **Charm, Illusion** | |
| Close blast 3; targets enemies; +18 vs. Will; the hag slides the target 5 squares. The target then makes a melee or ranged basic attack against a creature of the hag's choice. | |
| **Clandestine Secret** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Teleport** | |
| The hag becomes invisible to enemies until the end of its next turn and then teleports 4 squares. | |
| **Deceptive Leer** (minor; recharge ⚄ ⚅) ✦ **Psychic** | |
| Ranged 10; +18 vs. Will; 1d6 + 10 psychic damage, and the target grants combat advantage to the hag's allies until the end of the hag's next turn. | |
| **Stolen Secret** (free, when the hag misses with an attack; encounter) | |
| The hag rerolls the triggering attack roll and uses the second result. | |
| **Alignment** Unaligned | **Languages** Common, Elven, Giant |
| **Skills** Religion +18, Stealth +18 | |
| **Str** 10 (+7) | **Dex** 22 (+13) **Wis** 22 (+13) |
| **Con** 20 (+12) | **Int** 11 (+7) **Cha** 17 (+10) |
| **Equipment** staff | |

### Encounters

Hags usually work behind the scenes, directing their underlings and bound servitors to act in their stead. Other fey creatures, undead, brutish humanoids and brigands, and even aberrant creatures can all be found in the service of an individual hag. If an encounter turns violent, these creatures rush in to fight, while the hag either picks its attacks with careful cunning or flees.

## Spellbred Scorpion

Scorpions can be the scourge of dry, warm regions, though some species of this venomous vermin can be found in cold, wet climes. However, the common forms of these arachnids are mere precursors to spellbred scorpions, which can appear as tiny stinging pests one moment, and the next, as monstrous creatures whose stingers can kill a victim in a heartbeat. Even when grown to full size, legendary scorpions make their spellbred cousins seem miniature.

### Lore

**Religion 29:** Spellbred scorpions are a line of scorpions created by powerful divine magic. This effort produced creatures capable of serving as perfect assassins. Merely leave a clay pot of spellbred scorpions behind in a place a "person of interest" is expected. When the victim draws near, the scorpions burst forth as full-size monsters and quickly dispose of the target. After their target is slain, they revert to their tiny size and scuttle away into the night.

**Religion 30:** Legendary scorpions are spellbred scorpions given special attention; they are infused with divine magic and a steady diet of souls. They've lost the ability to change their size and become so massive few can stand before them.

## Encounters

Spellbred scorpions are usually encountered with others of their kind; they work as a team to dispose of anything threatening them, or to kill a victim impressed upon them by their breeder. Sometimes they appear in the presence of an allied creature, including a legendary scorpion. Those who have mastery enough to keep a clay pot of these creatures close merely needs to smash the vessel to create an instant and terrifying bodyguard. Woe to those who try this and are not masters of that which they release.

**Spellbred Scorpion** **Level 11 Skirmisher**
Large natural magical beast XP 600

**Initiative** +14 **Senses** Perception +6
**HP** 107; Bloodied 53
**AC** 25, **Fortitude** 22, **Reflex** 24, **Will** 23
**Speed** 7

⊕ **Pincers** (standard; at-will)
Reach 2; +16 vs. AC; 2d8 + 4 damage, and if the target grants the scorpion combat advantage, the scorpion can make a *stinger* attack against the target.

⸸ **Stinger** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Poison**
Reach 2; +16 vs. AC; 1d6 damage and ongoing 10 poison damage (save ends).

⸸ **Punishing Stinger** (immediate interrupt, when an enemy hits the scorpion with a melee attack; at-will) ✦ **Poison**
Reach 2; +16 vs. AC; the target gains vulnerable 5 poison until the end of the encounter.

**Tiny Scuttle** (move; at-will)
The spellbred scorpion moves its speed as a Tiny creature, allowing it to move through nearly imperceptible cracks in rock, wood, and other materials. It returns to its Large size at the end of its move.

**Eight Legs**
The scorpion gains a +4 bonus to AC against opportunity attacks.

**Alignment** Unaligned **Languages** Understands Supernal
**Str** 20 (+10) **Dex** 24 (+12) **Wis** 13 (+6)
**Con** 11 (+5) **Int** 4 (+2) **Cha** 7 (+3)

**Legendary Scorpion** **Level 12 Elite Soldier**
Gargantuan natural magical beast XP 1,400

**Initiative** +11 **Senses** Perception +8
**HP** 246; **Bloodied** 123
**AC** 28, **Fortitude** 25, **Reflex** 23, **Will** 24
**Saving Throws** +2
**Speed** 7
**Action Points** 1

⊕ **Pincer** (standard; at-will)
Reach 4; +19 vs. AC; 2d8 + 5 damage, and the target is knocked prone.

⸸ **Dual Pincers** (standard; at-will)
The legendary scorpion makes two *pincer* attacks.

⸸ **Stinging Rain** (standard; recharge when first bloodied) ✦ **Poison**
Close burst 3; targets one, two, or three enemies; +17 vs. AC; 3d6 damage, and the target is slowed and takes ongoing 10 poison damage (save ends both).

**Pincer Slap** (minor; at-will 1/round)
Reach 4; +17 vs. Fortitude; the legendary scorpion slides the target 4 squares and the target is knocked prone.

⸸ **Punishing Stinger** (immediate reaction; when an enemy hits the scorpion with a melee attack) ✦ **Poison**
Reach 4; +19 vs. AC; target gains vulnerable poison 5 until the end of the encounter.

**Eight Legs**
The scorpion gains a +4 bonus to AC against opportunity attacks.

**Alignment** Unaligned **Languages** Understands Supernal
**Str** 23 (+12) **Dex** 17 (+9) **Wis** 14 (+8)
**Con** 19 (+10) **Int** 4 (+3) **Cha** 7 (+4)

# Pegasus

A pegasus is a winged horse of impossible strength, beauty, and majesty. Rarely sighted, when they do deign to touch down on solid ground, it is only for a moment to drink from blessed springs or fonts. Even more rarely does a pegasus agree to serve as a mount, and then only for someone of proven valor and courage.

## Lore

**Religion 27:** The original, eponymous Pegasus was the offspring of a greater god. With divine blood flowing in its veins, Pegasus helped several demigod heroes defeat great evils that threatened the world and the heavens alike. Wherever Pegasus stayed long enough, divine springs would burst from the ground, and anyone who drank of those waters was inspired with an abundance of creativity, wit, magic, or athleticism.

## Encounters

A pegasus scion is usually encountered with a hero of some renown, and more often than not serving the dictates of some deity, though not always good deities. While the pegasus scion bears a rider, the quests and purposes of both are the same.

| **Pegasus Scion** | **Level 16 Skirmisher (Leader)** |
|---|---|
| Large immortal magical beast (mount) | XP 1,400 |
| **Initiative** +17 | Senses Perception +12 |
| **HP** 151; Bloodied 75 | |
| **AC** 30, **Fortitude** 28, **Reflex** 30, **Will** 27 | |
| **Immune** fear; **Resist** 10 radiant | |
| **Speed** 7, fly 9 (hover) | |
| ⊕ **Hooves** (standard; at-will) | |
| +21 vs. AC; 2d6 + 9 damage. | |
| ↓ **Flyby Attack** (standard; at-will) | |
| The scion flies its speed and uses *hooves* at any point during the movement. The scion does not provoke an opportunity attack from the target when moving away from it. | |
| **Celestial Notice** (immediate reaction; when the scion or its rider hits an enemy with a melee attack; at-will) | |
| The target is bathed in light as bright as a torch and grants combat advantage until the start of the scion's next turn. | |
| **On Celestial Wings** (move; recharge ⚄ ⁞⁞) | |
| The scion moves up to double its fly speed. | |
| **From the Saddle** (while mounted by a friendly rider of 11th level or higher; at-will) ✦ **Mount** | |
| When the pegasus uses *flyby attack*, the pegasus's rider can make a melee basic attack in place of the pegasus's *hooves*. | |
| **Divine Presence** | |
| Attacks against the pegasus scion and its rider take a -1 penalty unless the scion is bloodied. | |
| Alignment Unaligned | Languages Understands Supernal |
| **Str** 21 (+13) | **Dex** 24 (+15) **Wis** 19 (+12) |
| **Con** 15 (+10) | **Int** 17 (+11) **Cha** 17 (+11) |

# MEDUSA

A medusa is a monstrous creature whose visage is so terrible that creatures that meet its gaze are turned to stone. Medusas are among the most feared creatures that stride the world; mere rumors of their presence in a nearby wood or cave can precipitate terrified riots.

## Lore

**Religion 31:** The oldest medusas are said to spring from the blood of ancient chthonic deities. As such, their power was vastly more fearsome than the serpentine-touched brood of "modern" ages. Luckily, only a few of these terrible medusa abominations remain.

## Encounters

Medusa abominations linger in the deepest, darkest, labyrinthine lairs they've created over lifetimes worth of delving. They prefer to be left alone, since their gaze is so deadly to all other creatures; however, on occasion, these abominations might ally with a few medusa archers and warriors.

### *About the Author*

**Bruce R. Cordell** is an Origins and ENnie award-winning game designer whose long list of professional credits include the new *Forgotten Realms Campaign Guide*™ ,*Keep on the Shadowfell*™, *Draconomicon I: Chromatic Dragons*™ and *Open Grave: Secrets of the Undead*™. Bruce is also an author of Forgotten Realms novels, including *Plague of Spells*, first book in the new Abolethic Sovereignty series.

| **Medusa Abomination** | **Level 17 Solo Controller** |
|---|---|
| Large immortal humanoid | XP 8,000 |
| **Initiative** +15 | **Perception** +17 |
| **Acidic Aura** (**Acid**) aura 2; while the medusa is bloodied, any enemy that ends its turn in the aura takes 10 acid damage. | |
| **HP** 652; Bloodied 326 | |
| **AC** 31, **Fortitude** 29, **Reflex** 31, **Will** 29 | |
| Immune petrification; Resist 20 acid, 20 poison | |
| **Saving Throws** +5 | |
| **Speed** 8 | |
| **Action Points** 2 | |
| ⊕ **Snaky Hair** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Poison** | |
| Reach 2; +22 vs. AC; 1d10 + 5 damage, and the target takes ongoing 10 poison damage and is slowed (save ends both). | |
| ➶ **Longbow** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon** | |
| Ranged 20/40; +22 vs. AC; 2d10 + 5 damage, and the target takes a -2 penalty to its Fortitude defense and is slowed (save ends both). | |
| ↓ **Snakes Eyes** (standard; at-will) | |
| The medusa makes two *snaky hair* attacks. | |
| ➶ **Swift Quiver** (standard; at-will) | |
| The medusa makes two *longbow* attacks. | |
| ✧ **Petrifying Gaze** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Psychic** | |
| Close blast 5; targets enemies; +20 vs. Fortitude; 2d6 + 3 psychic damage, and the target is slowed (save ends). *First Failed Saving throw:* The target is immobilized instead of slowed (save ends). *Second Failed Saving Throw:* The target is petrified (no save). | |
| ✧ **Terrifying Hiss** (minor, recharge ⚄ ⁞⁞) ✦ **Fear, Psychic** | |
| Close blast 5; targets enemies; +20 vs. Fortitude; 2d8 + 5 psychic damage, and the target takes a -2 penalty to defenses until the end of the medusa's next turn. | |
| ↓ **Gorgon's Tail** (immediate reaction; when the medusa takes damage from an adjacent creature; at-will) | |
| Reach 2; +22 vs. AC; 2d10 + 5 damage, and the medusa pushes the target 5 squares. | |
| ✧ **Vengeful Gaze** (immediate reaction; when the medusa is first bloodied; encounter) | |
| The medusa uses *petrifying gaze*. | |
| **Alignment** Chaotic evil | **Languages** Common, Supernal |
| **Skills** Arcana +21, Religion +17 | |
| **Str** 18 (+12) | **Dex** 25 (+15) **Wis** 18 (+12) |
| **Con** 19 (+12) | **Int** 26 (+16) **Cha** 2 (+4) |
| **Equipment** longbow | |

FORGOTTEN REALMS®

# Ed Greenwood's Eye on the Realms

# Deadeyes

*by Ed Greenwood ✦ illustration by Jason Juta*

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In the times before the Spellplague, most folk in Waterdeep knew of the Warrens, Skullport, and Undermountain from legends. The former were barely mentioned, but the latter two were described so luridly as to strain belief—not just their unbelievable treasures and perils, but the sheer immensity of the "ways below."

After all, many reasoned (to quote a Trades Ward daggermonger), "If there's level atop level of rooms an' passages an' I don't know what-all down there under our feet, stretching out long and wide enough to run half the city, what keeps it all from just collapsing down, right now, to where the Great Underwyrms gnaw? An' don't be tellin' me *magic* holds it all up, Tha's what they always use to patch over anything we scoff at!"

Yet that anonymous seller-of-knives, despite the widespread popularity of his views, was wrong: The subterranean spaces under Waterdeep *were* that extensive, and magic *did* hold them up. Now that much of Undermountain's upper levels are a new city neighborhood, Downshadow, fewer scoff at the extent of the regions beneath the cobbles. Belief, though, is still strained—now not by the existence and size of the underground levels, but at the notion (fact, actually) that there can still be secret passages and chambers in and around Downshadow that citizens have yet to discover—dark and hidden ways where beasts, criminals, and nameless menaces yet lurk.

One of those menaces goes by several names, and is known more by rumor and muttered tavern warning than through sightings or some public catalog of Downshadow's features. To some Waterdhavians, it is known as "The Whisperer." To others, "Deadeyes" or "Old Deadeyes." One tale names the creature "Harhoarguh," and it is the subject of the ballad "Old Lonely."

Not everyone agrees that these names refer to the same entity, but all confirm that the name they know belongs to a reclusive, silently drifting creature that lurks alone, floating and flying in secret ways beneath Waterdeep. There, the monstrous creature spies and pries, and only rarely drifts close to citizens to whisper to them. This beholder, for that is truly what it is, can even be found gliding along the darkest city alleys, aboveground, on the rare night. A few sages and adventurers know this mysterious monster rather better, and can say more about its nature. Most citizens do not find what they have to say reassuring.

## Harhoarguh Manyeyes

Before the tumult of the Spellplague, Waterdeep was known to be home to several beholders. One was a feared crime lord that dominated the sewers, and another the private pet of a noble family, confined to their North Ward mansion. Other eye tyrants, local tavern-tales correctly insisted, were to be found in Undermountain, most of them deep down. Yet other, lesser beholders dwelled unnoticed by most in certain crypts in The City of the Dead (Waterdeep's cemetery) and on the uppermost level of Undermountain.

Most of those subterranean beholders were tiny, their bodies little larger than a person's head. Others were undead death tyrants, magically bound to the decaying temple of a beholder cult that bored nobles and ambitious nobles revived from time to time (and still do, today). One of this number of beholders was still alive but trapped in magical stasis, literally walled away in a secret chamber by Halaster for some future use that never came (the Mad Mage perished—or so most folk believe—before the purpose of the beholder was ever revealed). That beholder was "Harhoarguh Manyeyes," an ancient eye tyrant first put into stasis by the Magelords of Athalantar in an earlier age, and recaptured by Halaster centuries later as it roamed Undermountain.

The Spellplague stripped away captor and cage, freeing the beholder into the tumult of Undermountain as the vast labyrinth shuddered and rumbled under the aftershocks of the first rolling, blue-fire-laced destruction.

Harhoarguh was used to a steady diet of mortal flesh from before its captivity. It had devoured men daily, both sacrifices made to it and prey it hunted down. It awakened ravenous and angry.

Many were the Waterdhavians it devoured in its initial liberty, when confusion reigned and citizens fled in all directions seeking sanctuary, escape, or to reach hidden magic or valuables. Harhoarguh's meals included their brains and the magic they bore—rings, bracers, and pendants that sometimes exploded or burned within it, and more often were twisted by the Spellplague, discharging their magic in floods that raged through the beholder's body.

Magic is more predictable now, and Harhoarguh is far more careful about what it devours, but the damage has been done. Ravaged from within by the chaotic magic of the Spellplague, the disfigured, horribly altered beholder has become the cunning, crazed loner described as "Deadeyes."

## The Whispering Beholder

Best known as "Deadeyes" because its eyestalks all now end in white, pupilless, endlessly weeping ruins rather than functioning eyes, Harhoarguh drifts along in dark places with only its central eye intact. The few who've had a good look at the beholder (and lived) swear its eyestalks must be blind, but that Deadeyes turns them as if it can see—and even stare.

The lone beholder has become a lurker, hiding, peering, and drifting silently, whispering to a rare few when it looms close to them. It avoids battle whenever possible, but hisses commands, suggestions, and morale-building comments to Waterdeep's disaffected and desperate. Those who've paid close attention to its deeds and whisperings say the beholder must be more than a little insane. It seems to have acquired a confused smattering of memories not its own from the brains it devoured. Deadeyes knows about all sorts of local alliances, treasures, secret hiding places, skeletons in closets both literal and figurative, and it might recognize the face of someone it has never met before, and know the person's name and something of their background, both public and shady.

Disturbingly, the beholder seems to delight in stirring things up in Waterdeep, goading adventurers into deeds with its aid and alliances. Then it often deserts them, without warning or explanation, only to reappear to provide help when it is needed most. Sane or not, no one can agree if the lone beholder just loves causing strife, or is pursuing some darker, unrevealed purpose.

Deadeyes seems to spend most of its time lurking in Downshadow, drifting in disused caverns and the bone-strewn lairs of dead monsters . . . except when it has a message to whisper. On many nights, it ventures briefly up into Waterdeep proper, either through known ways up into Dock Ward, or more often appearing mysteriously in the North Ward or Sea Ward. Certain longtime Waterdhavians who have dark backgrounds of their own murmur that a few secret portals, origins unknown, link Downshadow with certain rundown former mansions in the North and Sea Wards; they suspect Deadeyes uses them in its travels.

The infamous thief Talessa "Bloodcoins" Tanshar claims certain adventuring bands now seek out Deadeyes whenever they arrive in Waterdeep, to learn the latest news of local treasures, ambitious citizens they might target, and trouble they could profitably plunge into. She's taken to calling Deadeyes the "Dark Disturber" or the "Goader," names that are beginning to spread. And reportedly causing Harhoarguh to smile.

## No Less Deadly a Foe

A few daring inhabitants of Downshadow give darker warnings about Deadeyes, most agreeing on one peril: its eyes may no longer do what most beholder eyes do, but they are *not* dead. These anonymous sources swear that when the beholder wants its eyestalks to unleash magic, they can. These effects seem to almost be random, generated perhaps from the magic the eye tyrant devoured as the Spellplague raged.

There is fierce disagreement over these eye rays; are they truly random, or can Deadeyes choose or at least influence what its eyestalks hurl? No one is certain, and the topic is not something the beholder has shared. Several sources also believe (correctly) that one of the beholder's "dead" eyes can reliably emit *mage hand* or *ghost sound* (usually a gasp, stifled cry, whispered word, or clink of coins; almost always a lure to draw creatures closer) at the beholder's will. Its central eye is apparently unaffected by the Spellplague, and remains capable of dazing the beholder's foes.

## Some Truth

Deadeyes is given to bouts of wild recklessness, and the magic unleashed inside it is still changing the beholder inwardly. It might eventually gain different powers, go insane, or both. Deadeyes delights in being a "disturber," and aims to dominate Waterdeep through ever-increasing manipulations until it can dictate its whims from hiding—and use adventurers to eliminate any who resist it.

### *About the Author*

**Ed Greenwood** is the man who unleashed the Forgotten Realms® on an unsuspecting world. He works in libraries, writes fantasy, science fiction, horror, mystery, and even romance stories (sometimes all in the same novel), but he is still happiest churning out Realmslore, Realmslore, and more Realmslore. There are still a few rooms in his house with space left to pile up papers in . . .

### Harhoarguh's Eye Rays

If you decide to run Deadeyes in your campaign, you can simulate the beholder's additional eye ray effects quite easily. Deadeyes is, for the most part, a normal beholder eye tyrant, with three exceptions. First, it has the Plaguechanged keyword. Second, it has five additional options for eye ray effects. Each of the additional eye ray effects is found among other beholder types, almost as if the magic that wracked Deadeyes's body released the dormant power of these other beholders.

Third, Deadeyes can always manifest a *mage hand* or a *ghost sound* effect (as the wizard class features on page 158 of the *Player's Handbook*), at will as a minor action from any of its eye rays.

Finally, Deadeyes has more control over which of its eye rays activate at a time. When rolling for each of Deadeyes's eye rays, roll 1d20 instead of 1d10. On a roll of 11-15, one of its additional five eye ray effects activates (see below). On a roll of 16-20, Deadeyes can choose which of the fifteen eye ray effects it activates for that attack. The following additional eye ray effects are as follows:

- 11—Confounding Ray (Charm, Psychic): Ranged 10; +22 vs. Will; 1d8 + 9 psychic damage, Deadeyes slides the target 6 squares, and the target is dazed (save ends).
- 12—Fire Ray (Fire): range 10; +22 vs. Reflex; 2d8 + 9 fire damage.
- 13—Weakening Ray: Ranged 10; +22 vs. Fortitude; 1d8 + 9 damage, and the target is weakened (save ends).
- 14—Ice Ray (Cold): Ranged 10; +22 vs. Reflex; 1d8 + 9 cold damage, and the target takes ongoing 5 cold damage and is immobilized (save ends both).
- 15—Grave Ray (Necrotic): Ranged 10; +19 vs. Reflex; 2d8 + 9 necrotic damage.

# Skill Challenge Wrap-Up

By Steve Winter

(This is the final chapter in the "Ruling Skill Challenges" series of articles. After 18 installments, Mike has written a pretty exhaustive how-to catalog of skill challenges. As a wrap-up, we offer this look at skill challenges from the perspective of *Dungeon* magazine.)

When D&D 4E first appeared, skill challenges were a new concept to everyone, including those who write adventures for *Dungeon* magazine. We all learned together what this new approach could and couldn't do, and we're still exploring its potential.

In reviewing and editing adventures, we see many mistakes being made with skill challenges. We assume that if our writers are making mistakes, DMs are making them in their home games, too. These errors fall into four constant categories. To conclude "Ruling Skill Challenges," here are the top errors to avoid when crafting your own skill challenges.

## 1. The Subject of the Skill Challenge Is Too Dull

The issue of "too dull" is a fine distinction to make. This is because it impinges on one of the top uses for skill challenges, which is to formalize seemingly mundane tasks and get characters through them with a minimum of fuss. That's not their only use, of course, but it's an important one.

Players have a way of hyper-focusing on trivial details, then derailing the action by asking endless questions and relentlessly following every dead-end lead. Skill challenges can alleviate that. In fact, they're ideal for it—but only when the situation warrants their use. If tasks are truly trivial, then it's better to just assume that the characters handle them and move on.

The two worst offenders in this category are the skill challenge that covers traveling from point A to point B, and the skill challenge that covers collecting information about topic X. Both of these situations can make exciting skill challenges, but most of the time, they won't.

Journeys are poor fodder for skill challenges. That's not because journeys can't be challenging, but challenging journeys are better handled with different methods, such as actual encounters and hazards. If something exciting happens on the journey, don't gloss over it with a skill challenge. If only dull things happen on the journey—the types of things that happen on every wilderness outing, such as getting enough sleep and sticking to the path—then don't bother.

Gathering information involves a different type of "too dull." Too often, the info being sought is essential to the adventure. Without it, the characters won't know how or where to proceed. The moment "too important to fail" is inserted into the equation, the skill challenge becomes unexciting. Excitement arises from risk, which comes from a chance to fail. If failure is off the table because it would derail the adventure, then all of the players' dice rolling is smoke and mirrors, and they will pick up on that fact. Which leads directly to . . .

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## 2. The Skill Challenge Is Too Easy

Without a meaningful risk of failure, a skill challenge is nothing more than wrist exercise. "Meaningful" is a vague term; the risk of failure probably ought to range from 15 to 30 percent, with occasional forays all the way up to 50 or 60 percent in high-risk situations.

To some extent, the blame for too-easy skill challenges can be laid at the feet of the "Skill Check Difficulty Class" table from the *Dungeon Master's Guide* (page 61). It's acknowledged that the DCs on that table should be higher. Armed with that knowledge, DMs need to take the bit between their teeth and make the adjustments they think necessary in order to inject the proper amount of risk into their skill challenges.

The second part of difficulty is skill challenge complexity; i.e., the number of successes needed before three failures. Don't think of the complexity scale as beginning at 1 and rising to 5. Think of it as beginning at 2 and sometimes dropping to 1 or rising to 5. Complexity 1 is for *easy* skill challenges. Before using complexity 1, ask yourself, "if this skill challenge is easy, is it really a skill challenge?" The best use for complexity 1 is in skill challenges that need to be completed in the midst of combat, where characters have lots of other problems to deal with at the same time as the skill challenge.

## 3. The Situation in Question Isn't Really a Skill Challenge

There are two chief flavors in this food group: those that ought to be handled with one or two individual or group skill checks, and those that ought to be handled with straight-up roleplaying.

A situation that calls for more than one skill check is not automatically a skill challenge. Climbing a cliff is a classic offender here. It's perfectly reasonable to require more than one Athletics check to reach the top of a cliff, or to require an Athletics check plus an Endurance check, or even Athletics + Endurance + Nature. That doesn't make the situation a skill challenge. A skill challenge must involve some interactive decision-making. Responding to a set sequence of skill checks doesn't fit that bill.

That was an important point, so we're going to repeat it: *A skill challenge must involve some interactive decision-making.* Make a note of it.

At the opposite end of the bar are situations that require decisions but no dice rolls. Winning the confidence of the outlaw chief is a prime example here. Resolving this situation with skill checks of any variety is a dull solution. All that may be required is for someone to say, "we approach him respectfully and offer our loyalty." If that happens, the bandit chief is satisfied. If instead someone says, "we approach him haughtily and with a great show of strength"—BAM! Automatic failure, and no amount of skill checking will change the result.

Think of this as a line with "Nothing but Choice" at one end and "Nothing but Luck" on the other. The skill challenge sweet spot lies between those extremes: luck tempered by choice, decisions tempered by luck. Identifying these situations and devising the proper way to handle them is a big part of the DM's job.

## 4. There's No Consequence for Failure

D&D encounters tend to be binary. Combat is all or nothing; it always resolves with a clear winner and a clear loser. If you "succeed" in battle, you get to push on with the adventure. If you "fail" in battle, the players are probably generating new characters and the DM is writing a new adventure.

Skill challenges don't work that way. "Failure" in a skill challenge doesn't wipe out the party or reset the adventure to zero. But then, what does it do?

That is the million-dollar question. What does failure mean in a skill challenge? More to the point, what does failure mean in *this* skill challenge? Failure must have repercussions; otherwise, there was no point to the exercise.

Failure can't stop the adventure dead in its tracks the way a TPK would. Instead, it must throw obstacles in the characters' path. It makes their job harder somehow, either by weakening the heroes or strengthening the enemy. Characters might be forced into a fight they could have avoided, tricked into accusing a powerful but innocent NPC of a crime, led to believe that their foes will be vulnerable to fire when in fact they have resistance to it, or anything else, as long as it's a real, measurable handicap. Taking five hours instead of four to discover that villagers were killed by a werewolf is not a real, measurable handicap. Falsely concluding that the village is threatened by an 8th-level werewolf when the foe is actually a 13th-level werewolf lord very well could be.

## Everything Is Relative

All of these issues are interconnected. A too-dull situation is better handled outside of a skill challenge; something that doesn't rise to the level of a skill challenge to begin with will almost certainly be too easy; and a skill challenge that's too easy will be dull and probably won't have any meaningful consequence for failure.

The adventure The Maze of Shattered Souls includes three skill challenges that incorporate different approaches. Two of them cover no-no subjects mentioned above: gathering information and a journey from here to there.

The info-gathering challenge has four features that set it apart. First, it determines which enemies attack the characters in town. Second, it can give the characters a concrete advantage over a foe in a later encounter OR reverse the table and give that advantage to the enemy. Third, it can handicap the characters as they move into the next skill challenge. Finally, it addresses the characters' info-gathering attempts according to what they're trying to learn and how, not by what skills they use.

The journey skill challenge departs from the norm by including opportunities to gain successes without making skill checks. The journey presents specific obstacles which characters can handle with skills, but some of those obstacles can also be overcome if the characters have the right feats, powers, or magic items, plus the creativity to use them. The DM is instructed to turn a generous eye on any creative approach and is even given a few examples of what to watch for.

The final skill challenge is a unique puzzle. As with many puzzles, someone with incomplete data can reach the wrong conclusion. As characters work their way through solving the puzzle/skill challenge, the puzzle itself lays traps before the players which can lure them into rash action. If they take it, they might rack up the required number of successes in the challenge and still fail to accomplish their objective.

These are three examples of skill challenges that become more dynamic by breaking the mold. They're not the final word in anything. We intend to keep experimenting with this tool, and you should, too.


### *About the Author*

Steve Winter has been publishing D&D in one form or another since 1981. His bylines are too extensive to list. He's now a *D&D Insider* web specialist and editor for *Dragon* and *Dungeon* magazines.

# Building the Sandbox

BY JAMES WYATT

This is an amusing contrast to my last campaign. When I started writing Dungeoncraft, I spent ten columns planning out my Greenbrier campaign before I ever recruited players and started the game. Not so this time! I had my first session at the beginning of May, and session two is scheduled for June 5.

## Introducing . . . My Players!

I have a group of eight players lined up for this campaign. I didn't quite mean for it to get that big, but it happened and I don't regret it yet. Let me give you a quick rundown of who they are.

- Amy is my wife. She's been playing D&D with me, off and on, for most of the eighteen years we've been together, but she's not a very invested player. She's a campus minister and theology professor by day and an actor by night.
- Cassie is a computer game tester, actor, bartender, and improv performer. I met her doing a production of *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow* a couple years ago—I was Ichabod Crane and she was Katrina (the love of poor Ichabod's life).
- Mike is a computer game tester, actor, community manager, and improv performer. I met him after he and Cassie were in a show called *Captain Intrinsic* with another theater friend (who is not a gamer). Mike and Cassie got married this spring, and for their wedding present I got everyone in D&D R&D to autograph the three core books for them.
- Tony works for an airline. He missed our first session because of work. I met him in a production of *Arsenic and Old Lace*—I was Jonathan and he was Dr. Einstein, so we were on stage together a lot.
- Rachel works for a major gaming convention but has never played D&D before. She directed me in *Arsenic and Old Lace* and other shows and also appeared on stage with me twice, in *The All-Night Strut* and in *Lend Me a Tenor.*
- C is our son. (To protect the privacy of the minors in the group, I'll refer to them by initials only.) He and I were in *The Sound of Music* together a couple of years back, but we've known each other for over 13 years now.
- A is a friend of C's from school. He's a huge fantasy nut and has played past editions of D&D, but our first session was his introduction to the latest edition. He was most recently seen on stage as Oberon in his school's production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream.*
- Evan is A's father, and like him, has played past editions of the game. He works on social media for a local software company and, to my knowledge, has never been involved in theater.

## Preparation

I talked last time about the themes and stories I want to highlight in this iteration of Aquela. Given this group of theater geeks as players, I've been trying hard to ensure that the potential for exciting story is present in what is more or less a sandbox game. I want the players to feel that they're driving the action and determining how the stories unfold. Here's how I set about doing that.

I always figured I was going to set my campaign in the Ducan archipelago, which was the site of my last Aquela campaign as well. I have a reasonable map of it, and I know it better than most of the rest of the world. So the first thing I did was to sit down with that map and try to chart out what 20 levels of adventures in that archipelago might look like.

Why 20? I figure by the time the characters hit epic tier, they ought to be looking beyond this one, tiny archipelago. They might or might not visit other planes, but at the very least I want them to be dealing with larger threats that take them beyond this single chain of islands.

I broke those 20 levels of adventures into four bands of five levels each, and then brainstormed what threats they might face in each band. I drew on all my previous brainstorming to guide my choices and ended up with an initial list that looked like this:

- **Level 1-5:** Hammer & Chisel Society (cult of Mual-Tar), lizardfolk, young black dragon (level 4), elves, bullywugs, and possibly kenkus, myconids, and/or kobolds
- **Level 6-10:** sahuagin, Stormfury orcs (Mual-Tar again), harpy (6), Demogorgon cultists (6–8), gnoll, shadar-kai, vine horrors, snaketongues, human pirates (MM2), ettin

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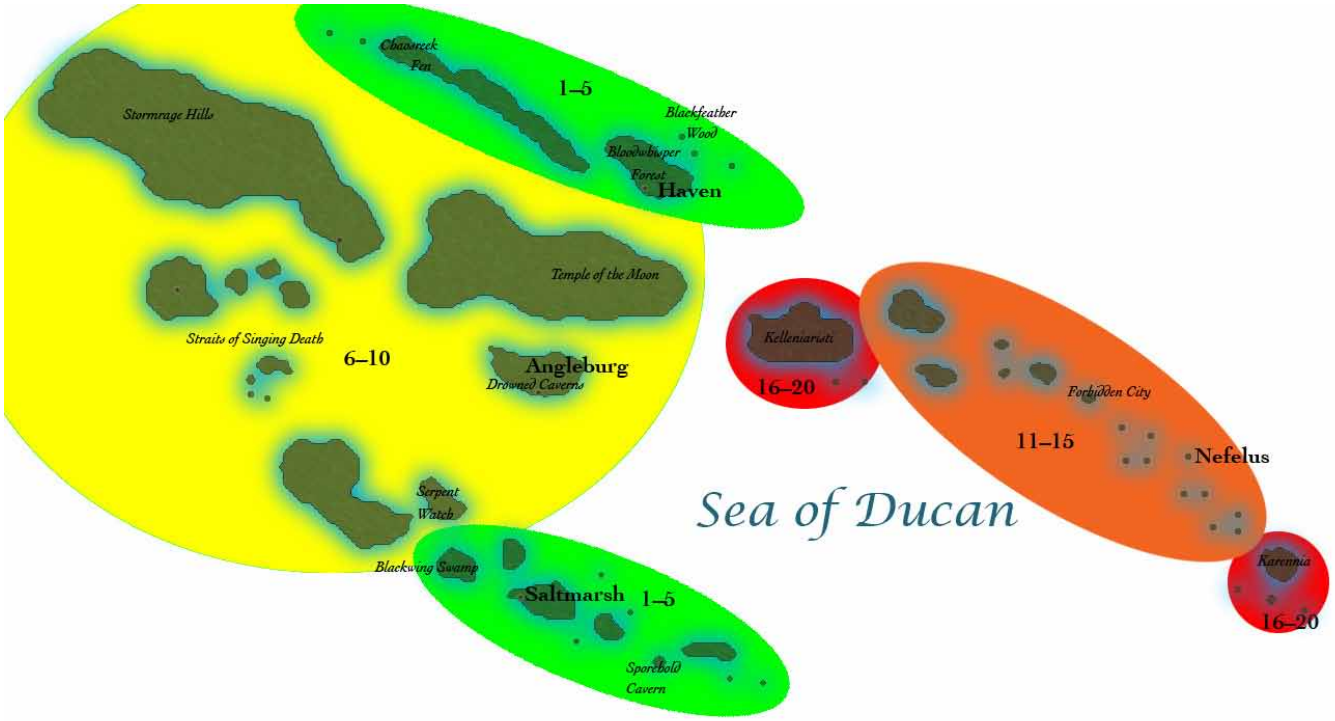
- **Level 11-15:** yuan-ti, kuo-toa, adult black dragon (11), adult bronze dragon (14), Dwellers of the Forbidden City, Sarpacala (yuan-ti followers of Mual-Tar), water archons, and possibly drow, githyanki, minotaurs, and/or salamanders
- **Level 16-20:** Killesti, Kelleniaristi (fey lingerer, fomorian), Eldresh (cultist of Mual-Tar), elder black dragon (18), storm archons, djinn (20+), hydra, aboleth, rakshasa, slaads
- **All Levels:** elementals, demons, golems, homunculi, humans
- **Epic:** storm giants/titans, djinns, efreets, Dagon, Mual-Tar, maruts, abominations, colossi

Some of these were obvious choices because of the nature of the world (sahuagin in the oceans, lizardfolk and black dragons in the swamps) and the themes I'd already identified (all the cultists of Mual-Tar and Dagon, all the demons and elementals). A few others (those tagged as possibles) don't obviously fit in with my themes but might make good opponents anyway.

Using that list as a starting point, I made up a bunch of sites that could incorporate those threats. Some of them are sites that have some history in the campaign (Blackwing Swamp has always been infested with lizardfolk and a young black dragon), while many others are just names I made up to put on a monster lair (Chaosreek Fen is where the bullywugs are). I also incorporated a few other locations from existing adventures I might want to use, such as the haunted house from the classic (1981) adventure *The Sinister Secret of Saltmarsh* and the island of Nefelus from the recent (2009) adventure "Alliance at Nefelus" (*Dungeon* 165), which I found because its arctic sahuagin came up in my search of the D&D Compendium.




So my list looks like this:

- **Level 1-5:** Blackwing Swamp (young black dragon, lizardfolk), Chaosreek Fen (bullywugs), Bloodwhisper Forest (hostile elves), Sporehold Cavern (myconids), the Fire Warrens (kobolds who revere a fire spirit, lesser fire elementals), Blackfeather Wood (kenkus), Saltmarsh—Haunted House
- **Level 6-10:** Straits of Singing Death (harpies), Drowned Caverns (sahuagin—from *Evil Tide*), *Blooddraught* (Korthos Blooddrinker's ship—Dagon cultists and pirates), Ajur's Arches (lair of Blackwing pirates, adult black dragon), Stormrage hills (Stormfury orcs), Serpent Watch (snaketongue cultists), Temple of the Moon (shadar-kai)
- **Level 11-15:** Ruins of the Forbidden City (yuan-ti, tasloi, broken ones), Alliance at Nefelus (level 14)
- **Level 16-20:** Kelleniaristi (Eldresh, fey lingerer, fomorian)

With those sites at least named, I took my map and drew level bands on it, then added some of the sites to the map. As the characters get closer to the higher levels, I'll flesh out the map more, but here's what it looks like now.

What I don't have yet are any real stories attached to those sites. Those will come next.

## Character Creation

I was looking for a way to streamline character creation for my group of new players, and that's just one of many things that didn't go quite as I planned in my first session. It was all I could do to finish writing up the character backgrounds I talked about last time and plan a couple of encounters for these new characters to play. So we spent longer making characters than I wanted to. Fortunately, I had only five players for this first session, so it was a bit less terrifying than it might have been.

The backgrounds did their job quite well. I typed up each background and printed them on card stock so I could hand the background cards to the players and let them select appropriate ones for the characters they wanted to play. Here's an example:

### REFUGEE

You were born and spent all your life in the village of Fenrise, at the edge of the Chaosreek Fen. You always knew that the monstrous froglike humanoids of the swamp, the bullywugs, were a danger to the village, but you never dreamed that they could become such a threat.

A week ago, bullywugs swarmed out of the fen in numbers never before seen. They overran the village, tore down its walls, toppled the houses from their poles, and left nothing standing. Hundreds of people died—your friends and some family members.

You survived only by taking to the sea in a fishing boat. A dwarven vessel came to your rescue, lifting your boat and those of the other survivors from the sea. Every survivor of Fenrise is now aboard this dwarven ship, bound for the town of Haven and the chance to start a new life.

**Benefit:** Your life in Fenrise taught you much about the swamp and the ways of nature. You gain a+2 bonus on Nature checks, or you can treat Nature as a class skill.

**Races:** Human, Elf, Liminal, Goliath
**Classes:** Ranger, Fighter, Rogue, Druid, Shaman, Barbarian, Warden

As I explained last time, I created these backgrounds to help get the players invested in their characters and the campaign as quickly as possible and also to give the players a concrete reason to be on a ship at the start of the campaign. While they work just like the backgrounds that appear in *Player's Handbook 2* and other sources (except that I narrowed the benefit options a little), many of them also include some quest elements. This background, for example, gently points the player back to the Chaosreek Fen, which is one of the sites I brainstormed earlier. (Now that site has a bit of story attached to it, doesn't it?)

Similarly, the Arcane Apprentice background points to Bloodwhisper Forest and specifically to an ancient tower in the heart of the wood, while the Wilderness Exile background has the character hailing from that forest. The Mendicant Priest background points to Blackfeather Wood, to a crypt sacred to the Raven Queen. I don't have pointers to all the sites in the first band of five levels, but I have enough that when the characters start trying to decide what to do, they should feel like they have some options.

I added suggested races and classes to each background to help the players think about what kind of character they wanted to play. I made it clear, however, that these were only guidelines, and it's a good thing I did. Mike chose the Refugee background for his dwarf fighter, Carlos. I explained that the village of Fenrise was a predominantly human village, but he was part of the small dwarf community—or perhaps the village's only dwarf.

The other thing that really pleased me about how the backgrounds worked was that the players felt free to tweak them, in consultation with me. Cassie, who modeled her ranger character on Buffy the Vampire Slayer, decided that the Aspirant Knight background seemed most Buffy-like:

### ASPIRANT KNIGHT

The Order of the Green Flame is a knightly order dedicated to fighting the forces of Chaos when they intrude into the world. Named for a mythical fire burning at the heart of an enormous emerald, the order seeks to destroy demons and elementals, root out cults dedicated to liberating the defeated Primordials from their imprisonment, and banish the influence of the alien Far Realm from the world.

For as long as you can remember, you have wanted to become a knight of the Green Flame, and the opportunity now lies before you. A member of the order, Sir Brendan of Haven, has agreed to meet you for an interview and consider your application for admission into the order. You are now on a dwarven vessel bound for Haven, gearing up for that fateful interview.

You must not fail!

**Benefit:** You have made a particular study of creatures from the Far Realm. Because of this study, you gain a +2 bonus on Dungeoneering checks, or you can treat Dungeoneering as a class skill.

**Races:** Human, Elf, Liminal
**Classes:** Paladin, Warden, Fighter, Warlord

Cassie wondered whether she could already *be* a knight, rather than trying to become one. I agreed, and told her that her meeting with Sir Brendan was about advancing further in the order rather than joining it in the first place.

Evan was drawn to the Secret background. I had two secrets prepared, one benign and one a little less so. When I went off with Evan to offer him those options, he told me he had a secret already in mind: his wizard is possessed by a demon which sometimes takes control of his actions. That didn't connect directly to any of the story lines I'd been thinking about when I wrote my secrets, but I let him go with it, told him he fled from the city of Saltmarsh because of the things he'd done under demonic influence, and filed it away as something to ponder later.

## The First Encounter

The first idea that took shape in my head for how to start the campaign was this hastily scrawled note in my notebook: "first adventure begins with the characters all on a ship together, and it comes under attack by Korthos Blooddrinker. There's a skill challenge to rescue people and avert as much disaster as possible, but they end up wrecked on an island. It's not a terrible marooning, because they're on a well-traveled route and another ship will undoubtedly come by soon and rescue them . . . but in the meantime, elves or kobolds or kenkus or bullywugs or something start raiding them during the night, so the other survivors urge the PCs to venture inland and put a stop to the raids (maybe recover prisoners or supplies they stole)."

With that idea in place, I set about planning backgrounds that would get the characters all on that ship. Then the night before the game, I tried to figure out how this skill challenge would work. The overarching goal of the challenge was to minimize the catastrophic impact of the pirate attack on the ship, then get the surviving crew and passengers and salvaged cargo safely to the nearest shore.

I planned ways that the characters could use their skills to a) protect the crew and passengers from pirate attack, b) rescue the cargo, c) repair or protect the ship, d) fight the pirates, or e) ready the ship for evacuation. What did they do? Almost all of them opted to fight pirates, of course. They figured the crew and passengers could take care of themselves, and the only character who cared about the cargo was A's rogue, who decided to see if there was anything he thought might be worth keeping for himself.

The characters killed a lot of pirates. Their strategy evolved into trying to seize the pirate ship so they could sail away on it when their own ship went down. Finally, I had to bring out Korthos Blooddrinker—I used the stats for the goliath guardian (level 9 soldier) from MM2 for him—to make sure they got properly shipwrecked.

Can you fight Korthos Blooddrinker? Sure you can. Is it a good idea? Probably not. Once they realized how hard he was to hit, I let them get away easily and join the crew and passengers on the lifeboats. So we'll pick up next session with their emergency landing on the nearest shore. And I'll need to decide whether they're near Blackfeather Wood, the Fire Warren, or perhaps the goblin-infested city of Gorizbadd (featured in the new adventure *The Slaying Stone*). All I know for sure is that I want their exploration of this dungeon to open up some mysteries that they want to explore, things that point to future adventures and the big themes of the campaign.

## Flashbacks

Three players couldn't play in our first session. Tony was working, Rachel was coming back from a wedding, and C was too tired. But a week or so after that session, Tony came over for dinner and some gaming. We made up his character and then decided to run a quick little D&D experience to get him better acquainted with the rules and his character.

I decided it was a flashback—an earlier adventure that his character (Aerin, a human cleric) and Amy's character (Vanri, a genasi/jann sorcerer) had been on together. It's a good thing I'm a professional, because I was able to throw together three encounters (we only played through two of them) with enough of a story that it made sense, all completely on the spur of the moment.

Amy chose the Arcane Apprentice background, which describes how she has studied magic with a wizard named Laurish Samprey (who is an important NPC in the old adventure *Evil Tide*, which I'll be adapting at some point in the level 6–10 range) on Angler Island. Tony chose the Agent of Civilization background: he's a cleric of Erathis dedicated to the idea of rebuilding civilization in the wake of the Empire's fall. The story of this little dungeon delve was that Laurish Samprey sent Vanri to the old, dark lighthouse on a nearby island to reclaim the *residuum* left behind by the decay of its magical light. Aerin accompanied her, because safeguarding people who dare venture into the wild places of the world is part of his mission as an agent of civilization. I also made up a paladin companion character to accompany them, because Aerin is not a melee cleric. The three of them traveled to the lighthouse, fought a bunch of bullywugs, earned victory by the skin of their teeth, and returned to Samprey with the *residuum*.

The flashback worked really well. Vanri and Aerin have a connection now, so they'll have some reasons to want to work together as the campaign gets started in earnest. Tony will be able to come to the next session with a character ready to go, and more importantly, he'll be a little bit more comfortable with the game.

In fact, it worked so well that we're planning to do the same thing for Rachel next weekend. Rachel has never played D&D at all before (everyone else had played at least a session or two), so it'll be a great way to get her up to speed without throwing her right into the deep end with the larger group.

By this time next month, I'll be gearing up for our third session, and I should have more concrete ideas about how the stories are going to play out.

### *About the Author*

James Wyatt is the Creative Manager for D&D R&D at Wizards of the Coast. He was one of the lead designers for 4th Edition D&D and the primary author of the 4th Edition Dungeon Master's Guide. He also contributed to the Eberron Campaign Setting, and is the author of several Dungeons & Dragons novels set in the world of Eberron.